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POCKET NOVELS

Nat Wolfe.



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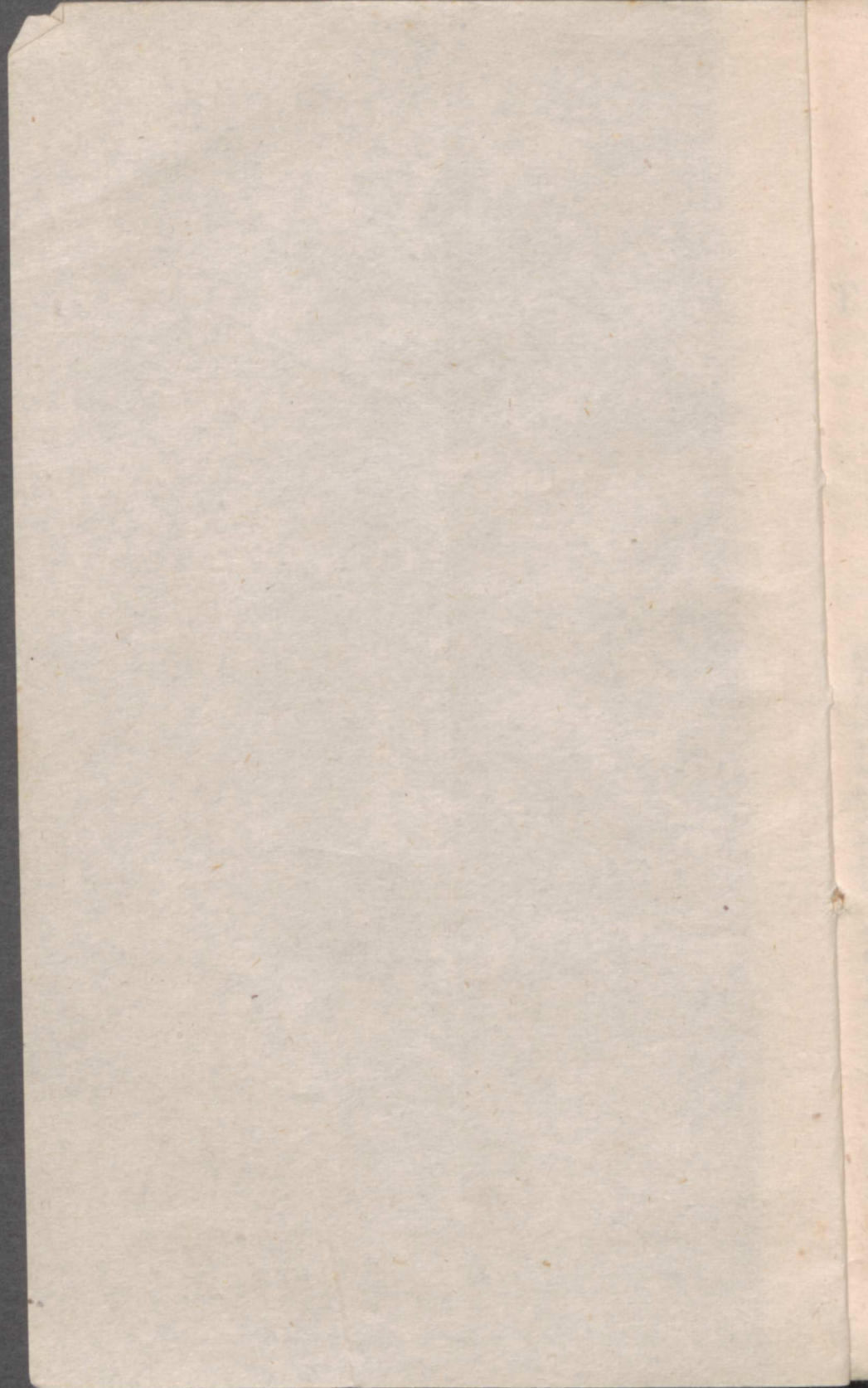
THE GOLD HUNTERS.

A ROMANCE OF PINE'S PEAK AND NEW YORK.

BY JAMES H. VICTOR.

NEW YORK:

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BY MRS. M. V. VICTOR

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
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NAT WOLFE;

OR,

THE GOLD HUNTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE RESCUE.

"Their black hair, thick and lowering,
Above their wild eyes hung,
And about their frowning foreheads
Like wreaths of night-shade clung.
'The bisons! ho, the bisons!'
They cried and answered back.
The frightened creatures stood aghast
To see them on their track."

WITH rifle on shoulder and knife in belt, Nat Wolfe rode along carelessly, for it was midday, and the country was open. That caution which ten years of uncivilized life had taught him never entirely slumbered, and he gave a sharp glance ahead, when, upon turning a low bluff rising out of the plain just here, he descried travelers in advance of him. A moment assured him that they were a family of emigrants making their toilsome way to Pike's Peak. He had seen hundreds of such during the season; had sometimes aided them in cases of sickness and famine; and had cursed in his heart the folly of those men who had brought with them their women and children to share in the hardships of the journey.

The party he now observed was only one of multitudes presenting the same general features. There was a stout wagon, drawn by three pairs of lean oxen at a slow and lumbering pace—probably the last wagon of a train, as it was seldom that a family ventured upon crossing the plains alone. If so, the train was out of sight along the track, which here becomes less monotonous, winding among the bluffs and along the shallow bed of a river, in which, at present, no water was visible. The driver had attempted to lessen the difficult task of his team while ascending a long swell of ground, the heavy wheels of the wagon cutting deep in the sand, by dislodging the two women and three children from their seats in the conveyance. The sun was hot, the air languid, and there were no cool shadows of trees to break the heat and glare of the way. The two elder children, who were boys, ran on with spirit, but a four-year-old

girl lagged behind and cried, while the women toiled on with listless, dragging steps. As Nat watched them, one of them stooped and took the poor little child on her back.

"It's too bad!" muttered he, spurring his horse forward.

The whole family looked back anxiously when they heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, the driver involuntarily reaching for his rifle, as the route was one of frequent danger and dread.

"Halloo, madam, let me carry your cub for you," called Nat riding up and lifting the child from the bent back to the neck of his strong animal.

There was a kindness in his voice which dispelled fear, even that of the shy little creature in his arm.

"Thank you, sir."

He looked down at the speaker curiously, for her tone and manner were unexpected. She was a girl, of not more than seventeen, slender, and with a face too quickly hidden again by the drooping and uncomely sun-bonnet, for him to realize fully its peculiar and melancholy beauty.

Nat Wolfe was a hater of Indians and hunter of bison, not a lady's man; so he rode in advance of the slouched sun-bonnet to the side of the wagon.

"Another fool!" was his curt, sarcastic greeting.

"I begin to think so myself," answered the emigrant, whose hollow cheeks and emaciated frame gave force to his disconsolate words. It was evident he had been sick on the way.

"Pike's Peak, I s'pose?"

"Yes."

"You're late in the season."

"Was down with the fever back to Pipe's Creek; kept us two weeks."

"Where's your company?"

"Just ahead. They're to stop at that little strip of cotton-woods we're coming to, for dinner. I hope they've found water for the cattle."

"Not a drop. You'll have to press on smartly if you reach water this evening. The nearest, on this trail, is fifteen miles beyond. I was over the route yesterday."

"Sho! the teams'll have a tough pull through this sand; they'd be glad of a drink now."

"What possessed you to bring this little thing along with you, stranger? It's bad enough for men, let alone wives and babies."

"That's so. But fact is, Meranda's got to'able used to follering me about. When I fust went out to Indiana I left her to home in York, and she won't never be left behind sence. She's emigrated to Missouri with me, and two years ago to eastern Kansas, and now we're a-marching for the mines."

"Marching for the poor-house," growled Nat. "I'm a 'rolling

stone' myself, but then I ain't a family man, and have a right to do as I please."

"Well, the fact is, things hain't prospered with us as they seem to with some people. We've had bad luck."

"And always will, I reckon," again muttered Nat, taking in at a shrewd glance the whole air of the man.

They had now reached the summit of the bluff, and at its foot, on the other side, along the edge of the stunted strip of wood which there freshened the eye, was drawn up the emigrant-train for a brief rest. The cattle were not unyoked, nor were there any fires kindled. The men were eating their cold bacon and hard bread, some lounging on the ground and some in their wagons. Only one woman was visible among the party of thirty or forty men, besides the two now trudging along by the last wagon. Nat did not resign the little girl until they came to the halting-place, when her father came and lifted her down.

"Won't you take a bite with us?" he asked, in return for Nat's civility.

"Obliged to you, stranger; but I've got a bit of dried buffalo in my pocket, and a biscuit."

Before dismounting and tying his horse to the low branches of a cottonwood, the hunter rode along the line of wagons to see if he knew any of the party. He had lived so long in that region that he was widely known, having a fame of his own which just suited his peculiar ambition, and which he would not have exchanged for that of General or Senator. So, although he was acquainted with none of the faces here, he was recognized by several, who greeted him heartily, and passed his name from lip to lip. The emigrants could not but feel braver and in better spirits when they heard that Nat Wolfe was among them.

As he lounged under a tree, against which he had carefully rested his rifle, cutting off bits of dried meat with the knife from his belt, he was surrounded by eager inquiries, asking after the route—with which they knew him to be familiar—about the water, the feed, the Indians, the streams, the storms, etc. While he talked, his eyes were constantly wandering to the little spot of shadow where the young girl was sitting, patiently feeding the little one, but seeming to eat nothing herself. She had thrown aside her bonnet to catch a breath of the light breeze springing up on the plains; her eyes were fixed afar off, on the heads of bison dotting the vast, monotonous desert, or the horizon, which ringed it in—except for the care of the child, she hardly took an interest in the scene more immediately about her. Whether it was the beauty of her face or its sad patience which touched him, Nat did not inquire of himself; he only wondered who she was and what she was doing in such a place. He could trace no resemblance between her and

the thin, sun-burned, care-worn-looking woman by her side, the mother of the children, but evidently not of the young girl. They surely could not be sisters, for they were too unlike.

Neither the fierce sun, nor the fiercer wind of the prairies had spoiled the rich, dark hue of her skin, a clear olive on brow and temples, melting into a glow on either cheek. The melancholy eyes were large and dark, and floating in liquid fire—a fire that, however slumbering and repressed, seemed made to flash forth laughter and love. Her hair, instead of being neglected, as her present mode of life would have excused, or “done up,” frontier-fashion, in a rude knot, was woven in glossy braids, wound tastefully about her head. The faded calico dress, awkwardly fitted as it was, could not conceal the rounded outlines of her form, any more than the coarse shoes and the wearisome journey could deprive her movements of their natural grace.

“See if he won’t take a drink of this cold coffee, Elizabeth; it’ll fresh him up more than whisky,” spoke the older woman, pouring out a draught into a tin-cup, and giving it to the girl, who rose and approached Nat with the simple offering which testified their gratitude for the trifling kindness he had done them.

Too young and innocent to feel the full awkwardness of her position, in the midst of so many rough men, yet with a demeanor of shrinking modesty, she passed through the crowd surrounding the hunter, and gave him the cup.

“Thank you, child. It’s just what I wanted to top off this salt meat,” and drinking the beverage, Nat returned the cup to her hand with a smile which brought the flush to her cheeks.

“Pretty girl that,” remarked one, as she retreated quickly.

“Yes,” replied Nat, gravely, “and I wish she were where she ought to be, instead of in such company as this.”

“So do we all,” said another, warmly. “There’s none of us would harm a hair of her head—and if we did, that uncle of hers would teach us better manners. He sets more store by her than by his own children, I do believe.”

“Bosh! he hain’t got spirit enough to take care of his own women-folks,” added a third.

“So she’s his niece?” queried Nat.

As he threw another admiring glance toward the maiden, he met one as admiring in return. Safe beside her aunt, she was regarding him shyly, and with something of interest lighting up the apathy of her expression.

There were not many who could first see Nat Wolfe without being attracted to give him another look. He had an air of absolute self-reliance, in which there was not a shadow of bravado; it was the coolness of often-tested strength and courage; his piercing eyes read every thing at a glance. Over six feet

two in height, he was so lithe and symmetrical that he did not appear as large as he really was. His unshorn hair and beard, and his hunter's dress, gave a roughness to his appearance which was at least both picturesque and appropriate. Nat Wolfe would not have been himself, without the long boots drawn over the doeskin pants, the blue shirt, the leather belt, the brace of revolvers, the knife and the rifle which formed his daily costume. Perhaps a rifle can not properly be called an article of costume; but Nat's was to him like his good right arm—eating, sleeping, on foot or in saddle, it never left his side.

The smile he had given the girl was enough to make her look back at him kindly; it was a smile which he kept for children and helpless things, and all the brighter for being rare.

"You'd better be pushing on, men; it's fifteen miles to the first drop of water; it'll be ten o'clock to-night before your teams can reach it, if you urge them to do their best."

"I'm thinkin' we had," responded the leader of the train. "Goin' to ride our way, Wolfe?"

"Well, yes, I'm bound your way, at present. I'd thought to make forty miles before midnight, but I don't know that it matters. Maybe I'll keep 'long-side for a while."

The cold provisions were returned to their boxes, the women and children climbed to their places, the drivers flourished their heavy whips and shouted and swore at the patient oxen. As usual, Timothy Wright was the last to get started; and his niece Elizabeth, as she sat under the tent-like cover of the wagon, looked out forlornly on the winding array, tired of every thing but of seeing the strange horseman riding at the head of the company, and wishing he would stay with them forever.

Yes, forever! that did not seem too long to say, for she was sure the journey was endless—there was no limit to any thing more—the earth was like the sky, the desert was illimitable; she should never get away from that dreary caravan, never see trees or mountains again; the cattle would never crawl over all that heavy sand, they would never reach the far-distant Pike's Peak—never see the gold glittering in heaps all over it—thus the sad thoughts drifted through her mind as the sand drifted before the afternoon breeze.

Several times in the course of the afternoon, she crept out of the slow-moving wagon and walked by its side. The prairie was cut up by deep gullies worn by the spring freshets, and when the great wheels went jolting down these, it was pleasanter to be out of the wagon than in it. Although the track was sandy along which they wound, there was still a scanty covering of short grass struggling up through the arid soil, and occasional fringes of stunted cottonwood along the banks of

empty streams—mere brush—trees she would not call them who remembered the magnificent forests of the home of her youth.

"Blas* it! I've broke an axle!" exclaimed Timothy Wright, as the wheels went down a steep rut with a dangerous jerk, and stuck there. "The whole lot's gone over safe but me. Of course if there's trouble, it'll fall to me."

"It's our luck, Tim," said his wife, despondently.

"That's so. Every thing goes against us. Hello! hello there! They don't hear me, they're so far ahead. You run on, Elizabeth, and holler as loud as you can. It couldn't be worse than to happen just now," he continued, in a complaining tone, as he went to work to unstrap the extra pair of axletrees which each wagon carried in case of just such accidents.

"It'll put us back so we won't get to camp before midnight. Blast it, it's just my luck."

In the mean time Elizabeth ran on to attract the attention of the party and obtain help in repairing the damage. She was fleet of foot than the lumbering oxen, and the train was not more than a quarter of a mile in advance. She expected every moment when some one, chancing to look back, would comprehend the state of affairs and stop.

Suddenly she discovered that the train was thrown into confusion. At first she could perceive no reason, but a sound as of rumbling thunder drew her attention toward the south. A vast herd of bison had come into view, rushing up from a valley which had concealed them, and pouring down impetuously directly across the track of the train. They had encountered many of these herds during the last few days, had passed around and even close beside them; but this vast army had been frightened by some real or suspected danger, and the electric thrill of terror which flashed through their palpitating breasts made them blind to the obstacles in front of them. On they came by thousands, darkening the plain, shaking the earth, threatening to annihilate cattle, goods and men. To attempt to oppose their resistless numbers would have been like flinging feathers in the face of a whirlwind. Forward they swept, near and nearer, and for a few moments it seemed as if all were lost; the men did the only thing they could do to save themselves—they fired their rifles as rapidly as possible in the face of the enemy. The flash of fire-arms, and perhaps some of the shots taking effect, saved the train from destruction; the immense horde swerved slightly to one side, and swept on more madly than ever, just grazing the last one of the teams, bearing down the wagon and trampling the cattle underfoot, but only stunning the driver, who was saved by the wagon falling over him.

And now the path of the bison was toward the unprotected girl, standing motionless with fright, her eyes fixed upon the

mighty sea of brutal life rushing down upon her, terrible and tumultuous. It was as well for her to remain riveted by terror as to flee, for flight could be of no avail—she could never outstrip that long wall darkening down upon her. She felt, through all the cruel pangs of anticipation, their hoofs trampling her young life into nothingness.

Then there came flying along in front of that rushing host a horse and rider. While the horseman had to sweep almost the whole line of the bison, they were galloping directly forward toward the girl, and it was a question of fearful interest to the lookers on as to which would reach her first—or whether he and his animal, as well as the hapless maiden, would not be overwhelmed.

As for her, she did not see him, or if she did, terror had so paralyzed her that she did not distinguish him from the multitude. Their hot breath already blasted her, when she felt herself caught up, and unable any longer to realize the truth, she gave a wild shriek and became lost to further consciousness of her situation.

When they saw Nat Wolfe stoop and swing the girl lightly up across the neck of his horse, the gazing emigrants in the distance gave an irrepressible shout, and again became breathless and silent, watching the further progress of events; for the herd had gained on the steed during the momentary halt, and being doubly freighted, the noble beast could not now run with his usual swiftness. A passion of terror had taken possession of him also, as he felt himself encumbered, and the bisons pressing upon him. He reared and whirled about madly, threatening to run upon destruction, instead of away from it. His owner bent and seemed to utter a word in his ear, at which he sprung forward, as if carrying no weight at all straight as an arrow from the shaft, quite in advance of the bellowing monsters throwing up the sand in clouds along their way.

Suddenly horse and riders went down into a ravine and were lost to sight, and the next moment the whole excited herd poured over like a torrent, and were seen thundering down the empty river-bed and speeding over the valley. As soon as the bisons had passed, the men started to ascertain the fate of the two human beings probably crushed to death in the river-bed. As they reached the edge of the ravine and looked eagerly over, Nat Wolfe crawled out from the shelter of the shelving ledge on which they stood, shaking the dirt and pebbles from his hair and garments.

"Hello," cried he, cheerfully. "All right. Hold on, till I hand up the girl," and he lifted her, just struggling back to consciousness, up to the ready arms held out for her; then, finding a rift which afforded him a foothold, he swung himself lightly after her.

"Well, I declare for't, Lizzie, you had a narrow escape—you're as white as a sheet," cried her uncle, reaching the scene just as she attempted to stand alone. "I don't wonder you're all in a tremble. Miranda's so scart she hadn't strength to walk. We thought you was gone for certain—and we didn't know but we was too. Them brutes came nigh to giving us a brush—we just escaped by the skin of our teeth. How on earth, stranger, did you manage to get out of the way?"

"By the merest chance. You see when we went down, my horse stumbled and fell—but I was too quick for him—I come down on my feet with the girl under my arms. It occurred to me, quick as a flash, that our only hope was to press close against the shelter of the bank and let them go over us. And over us they went in a manner not the pleasantest. I was afraid the shelving earth above would give way on us, the gravel and dirt rattled down so furiously. But here we are, safe and sound, aren't we?"

The light and color sprung to Elizabeth's face, as he turned to her with a careless laugh; she essayed to say something, to thank him for saving her, at the risk of his own life, from a terrible death, but her lips trembled and the words would not come. Nat liked to do brave deeds better than he liked to be embarrassed by thanks; he turned quickly from the glowing face, and looked after the distant herd.

"Poor Kit," said he, "I hope he has escaped as well as his master. I'd hate to lose that horse. He and I are one and inseparable. This isn't the first danger he's carried me safely out of."

"What do you think has happened to him?"

"Well, he regained his feet before the buffalo came over. I think like as not he held his own—just as the wise ones do—kept with the crowd and said nothing."

"It's a chance, then, if you ever see him again."

"Don't you believe it—if he hadn't known more than common folks, I wouldn't have named him Kit Carson. When he gets out of his difficulty, he'll make his way back here. I'll stay here all night if he don't get back before dark."

"And that puts me in mind that I'm like to be kept awhile too," said Wright. "I was just sending my niece forward for help, when that stampede of buffaloes took place. I've broke an axle."

"Let's set to work and repair damages then, if we don't want the cattle to go thirsty to-night. By the time we're ready for a start, I hope your horse will stray along, Wolfe."

"If he don't you needn't mind me. We'll overtake you soon enough if he does get back. And if he *don't*, I've spent many a night in worse places than this."

"P'raps part of us better go on," suggested one of the emigrants. "We can choose the camp, build the fire, and be getting

things comfortable for the rest. "It's like we'll kill a buffalo, and have a j'int roasted by the time you come up."

"I'd advise you not to part your forces," said Nat, quietly. "There's Indians about, and they're not particularly friendly. But don't be frightened, child," he added, as he saw Elizabeth grow pale again. "I don't think they'll venture upon any thing worse than begging. They're a set of thieves and beggars."

"If there's any thing in the world I mortally dread, it's Indians," she answered, in a low voice.

"These Indians are not the kind you read about—fierce warriors hanging to their horses' sides and hurling their poisoned arrows—they're a sneaking and dirty set of rascals who'd murder you if they dared. But they won't dare. They're afraid of Uncle Sam—and your party is too large and too well armed."

The men hastened away to see about the broken axle, while the young girl lingered a moment, looking at Nat wistfully.

"But you," said she, "will not you be afraid to stay here alone all night, waiting for your horse?"

"Afraid?"

A curious smile flashed over the hunter's face as he echoed the word; she read its meaning, blushed, and continued:

"Ah! I know you are afraid of nothing. Yet harm *might* happen to you; and I should not like you to suffer from an accident which comes upon you by saving my life."

"Don't think of it then. I live out-of-doors. I've slept a hundred nights on the open prairie as many miles from any white man. Good-by, little girl. I'm off after them buffaloes. I'll have the satisfaction of killing two or three of them in return for the fright they gave you; and I may find my horse quicker by following 'em up. Tell your people I've concluded to go after 'em. If I have good luck, I'll reach your camp yet to-night." So saying, Nat Wolfe swung his rifle to his shoulder, leaped down the bank, and started off with long strides across the lower plain.

An hour's hurried labor sufficed to repair the damaged wagon and replace the load; the emigrant train resumed its creeping pace, its weary company finding something new to think and talk about in the appearance of the hunter among them and the succeeding adventure. As it grew dark, they kept a sharp look-out, having examined their fire-arms and put them in order, the statement of Nat as to Indians in the vicinity giving them some uneasiness.

A new moon, sinking in the western sky, threw a melancholy light over the wide desert, enabling the drivers to keep the trail and push on for the water which they were assured was not far away. The heat of the day gave place to chilling winds, causing the wife and child of Timothy Wright to shrink down to the bottom of the wagon and wrap themselves in

blankets. But Elizabeth sat by her uncle's side, hugging her shawl close about her, and looking out at the moon with a tired, home-sick face.

"I guess you wish you was back to Missouri," he said, looking around at her, and speaking as if her looks were a reproach to himself.

"I don't know, uncle. I didn't like Missouri very well, either."

"It was unlucky, our settling where the fever and ague was the thickest. I'd a' done well there, if we hadn't been sick so much. And then Kansas was a poorly country whar' we tried it—the drought just discouraged me about that. It's mighty onpleasant for a young thing like you to be jolting along away out to Pike's Peak. But if we once get there, the worst'll be over; we'll see good times. You shall have a silk frock this time next year, Lizzie."

"I hope the gold will come as easy as you think, uncle. Those people whom we met, day before yesterday, coming back from the mines, didn't tell us much to brighten up our spirits."

"Well, I will say I was rather set back by their story. 'Twon't do any good to get discouraged now, though: we haven't provisions enough to carry us back, nor money to buy 'em. We must go ahead and make the best of it. Some folks may have better luck than others. I expect *we* shall just pick up the biggest kind of nuggets."

"You say you're not one of the lucky kind," she answered, smiling forlornly.

"It's a long lane that has no turn'—maybe I'm coming to the turn now. How's the young ones getting along, wife?"

"They're sound asleep, poor things, without supper."

"There's a fire ahead," spoke Elizabeth; "perhaps it's an Indian camp."

"Nothin' of the kind, Miss," answered a person who had been standing on the track, waiting for them to come up. "I run ahead and took a squint, while the teams waited; it's our campin' ground, and there's another lot of travelers in before us—a train most as large as our own. They'll be glad of our company, and we'll be glad of theirs. Hope you don't feel none the wuss from your scare to-day, Miss?"

"Oh no, not a bit the worse, thank you."

"I'd rather them blasted buffaloes had a' run down the hull train, than to have knocked the breath out of your purty body. I never felt more like a fool in my life, than I did when I saw the pickle you was in. I swore and cursed myself awfully for being such a fool as not to be able to do suthin'. You see I didn't have no hoss, and Nat Wolfe *did*—else he wouldn't a' got the start of me."

"I believe you, Joe," replied the young girl, laughing.

"I was so mad about it I wouldn't come forward when I hearn you were safe. I never was so put to my stumps before that I couldn't do suthin'. But ye see I'd fired both barrels of my gun and the hull load of my revolver to turn them pesky critters from the train, and when I see'd 'em making tracks for you, I was jest used up."

"It's all right now, Joe."

"Yis, but it goes agin' the grit to think it was Nat Wolfe done it instid of me. Ain't I the guide and purtector of the train? and it don't become me to be letting strangers save the women-folks from destruction. He did it in fust rate style, though; I'll say that much for him. As long as Buckskin Joe couldn't have a hand in the fight, I'd ruther it would be Nat Wolfe than anybody else."

"Do you know him?" asked Mr. Wright.

"Wal, I never sot eyes on him till to-day; but I knew him the minit he rode up alongside. All us trappers and guides knows him, leastwise by hearsay. I'd often hearn tell of that cut over his eye, and the queer color of his ha'r. The Injuns call him Golden Arrow, both bekase his hair is so yellow and bekase he's as swift and sure as a dart. They're 'so 'fraid of Golden Arrow they el'ar out whenever they hear he's about. I knew him by his hight, too. He's sent more buffaloes and red-skins to their furren huntin'-grounds than any other ten men on the plains. He fust sends an Injun to the spirit-land, and then, for fear the dead rascal won't have nuthin' to do in the new country, he sends a score of buffaloes after him to keep him in game. Years ago, when this country wasn't quite so thickly settled as it is now and every white man that tried to lay out a trail over the mountains had to fight them devils, inch by inch, Nat Wolfe took a lastin' hate to the sarpints, and he hain't got over it yet. He's a young-looking man now—twenty year younger'n me—but he's been in sarvice as long as I. I hope that train on ahead of us has got some fresh meat to spare, for I ain't bagged a buffalo to-day, we've been in such a hurry. I promise you a nice bit of antelope for your supper to-morrow, Miss."

The speaker was a small, wiry person, dressed in leather leggins and woolen hunting-frock, whose profession had been that of a guide for years; but the trail across the country being now so well defined and defended as to render his services rather supererogatory, he occasionally joined an emigrant train for the love of it, when not off with exploring parties. He was on his way to Pike's Peak with an idea of his own; his former experience led him to believe that he could make discoveries for himself in a certain part of the mountains as yet almost unvisited. Whatever the fond name some proud mother may have bestowed upon him in the far-off days of his babyhood, to whatever frontier family he may have belonged, and

to whose patronymic he would have done honor, all other titles were obliterated in that of Buckskin Joe. Perhaps fifty years of age, with iron-gray hair, sharp, weather-beaten features, as tough as he was small, supple, quick, enduring as iron, and ready for all emergencies, he had won considerable reputation as a guide, and was a valuable acquisition to our western bould party.

He had taken a great fancy to the beautiful, modest young girl whose face lighted up the rough company like a flower in a desert; and he could not recover from the mortification of having, for once, been caught in a situation where his wit was of no avail, and obliged to see another achieve a rescue which he was powerless to attempt. As he trotted along beside the wagon, he presently broke out again:

"It's all-fired mean to think I made sich a fool of myself. I've a mind to take it up and fight it out with Wolfe; he'd no business to come meddling with my matters. It was my business to look after the women-folks."

"So you had rather I should have been killed, than to have any one else but yourself save me?" queried Elizabeth, with a burst of silver laughter that sent the blood tingling through his veins. "If you feel so badly about it, Mr. Buckskin, I'll manage to get into danger again, and so give you a chance to retrieve yourself."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit if you did, without tryin' very hard, nuther. I don't pray for it; but if it comes, Buckskin Joe'll be on hand, you may bet your life. As for Mr. Buckskin, I don't know whar' he'll be—he's too perlite a feller for these parts."

"I beg your pardon, Joe," cried the young girl, merrily, her depression of spirits quite driven away for the moment by the quaint manner of the guide, whom she had already taken a liking to.

"Wal, don't do it ag'in," he responded, more disturbed by the civility than he would have been by a hug from a grizzly bear.

CHAPTER II.

THE STOLEN RING.

And, dear Bertha, let me keep.

On my hand this little ring,

Which, at night, when others sleep,

I can still see glittering.—MRS. BROWNING.

How are ye changed ! Ye take the cataract's sound,

Ye take the whirlpool's fury, and its flight ;

The mountains shudder as ye sweep the ground,

The valley woods lay prone beneath your might.—BRYANT.

THE spot on which the first emigrant train had pitched its camp was something similar to the river-bed where Nat and Elizabeth were screened from the bisons. A bank worn by the rush of spring freshets, partially sheltered them from the piercing night-wind, always high and sometimes disastrous, which rushed down over the Rocky Mountains, and rolled over the vast prairies with tremendous power. Here the stream was not yet exhausted by thirsty sands ; a few straggling cottonwoods stood guard over the water, one of whose dead number furnished dry fuel for a cheerful fire, welcome both for its brilliant warmth and the facilities it afforded for hot coffee and biscuits, fried bacon and broiled buffalo-steaks.

The first comers had just finished their supper, attended to their cattle, and were about bestowing themselves for the night, when the arrival of the second train kept them up, out of curiosity to observe their fellow-travelers, and to offer them the out-door hospitality of the camp.

The cattle, who had scented water afar off, and were frantic to get to it, had first to be attended to. The corral formed by the first train was enlarged by the addition of the wagons of the second, the cattle driven within the ring thus formed ; and while a portico of the party attended to this, the others were hastily preparing supper. Great as was their hunger, the appeals of sleep were almost more powerful ; so that food and drink were speedily cooked and dispatched.

While Tim Wright attended to his team, his wife and niece were busy at a small fire, apart from the crowd, boiling coffee and browning bits of bacon, thrust on the points of sticks, so that the fat of the meat would drip upon the biscuits toasting underneath.

"Here's a bit of fresh meat, if you'd like it, ladies," said the voice of a stranger. "It's a piece of young antelope, and will broil in a few minutes over those coals."

They looked up to accept the gift and thank the donor. He was a man of rather over middle-age, thin, tall, with dark eyes and complexion—almost a foreign and Southern aspect—low-voiced, and so entirely different in his manners from the sturdy men with whom he was in company, as to attract the remark of both.

"'Bliged to you," said Mrs. Wright. "Perhaps we're robbing you?"

"Oh, no! Our party supped two hours ago, and we have abundance for breakfast. Allow me, Miss—this way," and in the most courtly manner, as if he were attending upon a lady whom it was an honor to serve, he took the two sharpened sticks upon which Elizabeth was endeavoring to fasten the meat, and arranging it for her, aided her in bracing it properly over the glowing coals. As they were doing this, the firelight flashed brightly over Elizabeth's hand, seeming to concentrate upon a ring which she wore, the central jewel of which burned as the living sun. As the stranger observed it, he started and muttered an exclamation under his breath, which caused the young girl to look up and meet the searching gaze of eyes so piercing that they fairly suspended her will. It was nothing new to her to have strangers notice the ring; she knew that it was a strange ornament for a girl in her station of life to be wearing. The neighbors had always admired it, and asked the worth of the "pretty stuns," and whether it was "real gold." All that she herself knew about it was, that when she had obtained her full growth, so that the ring would fit her finger, her aunt had one day taken it from a little box put carefully away in the locked upper drawer of the bureau, and given it to her, telling her it had been her mother's. She guessed it to be valuable, though she did not dream that the white and crimson stones so curiously set, and so fascinatingly bright, would buy a farm and build a house as good as her uncle aspired to. If she *had* known its intrinsic value, she could not have prized it more—it was the most precious of possessions, for it was the only link between her and the dead mother, of whom she knew and remembered so little, but whose memory she so passionately adored.

Again the stranger's eyes sunk from the young girl's face to the slender hand upon which the ring sparkled vividly. He had forgotten to rise from his half-kneeling posture, or to say any thing in excuse for his engrossed and absolute surprise.

Mrs. Wright's disturbance of mind consequent upon the tumbling over of the broiling steak, broke the spell which had so suddenly fell upon the other two; the stranger re-arranged the meat, and withdrew to the other side of the inclosure.

When the meal was ready, the children were aroused from their sleep in the wagon and given a share. Their pretty aunt was hardly as attentive to them as usual; her eyes kept

wandering off into the darkness, as if they could pierce its mysteries.

The moon had descended beneath the horizon; the stars hung low and bright over the wind-swept plains—in the young girl's mind drifted thoughts of the handsome hunter who had that day saved her life. She wondered where he could be, solitary in the desert, with only that rising wind for company. She hoped he would find his horse, and follow on to camp; she would like so much to offer him a cup of hot coffee and a bit of fresh meat. It hardly seemed possible she should never see him again.

He did not arrive before they retired. Buckskin Joe came up to the family, as they were ready for the night's rest, to see if all was right—as head man of the train, he felt it his especial duty to watch over the females, particularly the pretty maiden.

"Been a-lookin' out for that yellow-ha'ed chap, Miss? I see you, when you wur a pretendin' to eat. For my part, I'm glad he's staid behind; not that I don't like Nat Wolfe as a ginerall thing, when he don't meddle with other folks' business. He mought a-known it was my business to look after the women-folks. I consider it a little uncalled for, his interferin' with them buffaloes, when I wur about."

"Haven't you got over that yet?"

"You can laugh if you like, Miss. I only hope my turn'll come next. Howsumever, I jist stepped up to say that you needn't consarn your liddle head 'bout Injuns. We're too strong for the cowardly thieves now; they won't ventur'. Jist you take the soundest kind of a sleep, so's to feel bright to-morrer."

"I shall sleep like a top, Joe, as long as you're on guard."

"You can jist do that very thing, Miss, as safe as a baby in a cradle. Well, good-night. The Lord bless and keep you, and presarve ye from the bite of a rattlesnake!"

This was Joe's favorite parting benediction, bestowed only on his friends—hardly an idle prayer, either, in that snake-infested country.

That night in camp was one of safety and profound repose. No accident marred the deep sleep of the emigrants. Once during the night, at that approach to morning when slumber is most enthralling, Elizabeth stirred in her dreams, half starting from her sleep with a smothered cry. She was dreaming that a rattlesnake had stung her hand.

The first thing she noticed as she left the wagon in the morning, to bathe her face and hands in the stream, was that her ring was gone!

A cry of grief and surprise made the loss known to her aunt, whose consternation was almost equal to her own.

"It was ruther loose for you; may be it's slipped from your finger while you was to work, Lizzie!"

"No, aunt; I am sure I had it on when I went to sleep. I

shut my hand on it as I always do. Somebody stole it from me in the night. It half aroused me, but not enough to realize what it was.

"Who could it be?"

"Who could it?"

Some instinctive feeling assured the young girl that the robber could be none other than the dark and courtly stranger who had scrutinized it so curiously the previous evening.

"I believe the person that took it was the one who gave us the meat, aunt."

"Sho, child! he didn't look like a thief. I never seen a prouder or a nicer-lookin' gentleman. He wasn't one of the common emigrants, by no means."

"I know he didn't look like a thief. He *looked* as if he'd sooner die than do a mean thing. But I can't help feeling as if it were he who took it."

"I'd sooner suspect some of them rough fellows that have had their eyes on it for days. And, after all, I don't believe nobody took it. You've just dropped it off—like as not into the fire. Let's take a good look."

They searched so long that they came near going without their breakfast, only desisting when they could no longer delay their preparations for a start. The two trains were to proceed forward together. The stranger did not offer any more civilities to the women, but Elizabeth saw him, more than once, with his dark eyes fixed upon her in intense watchfulness. She felt the impulse to go up to him and demand her property. Yet he looked so cold, so proud, so self-absorbed, so much as if the fiery flash of his anger and disdain would strike her with lightning, that she did not dare.

In the midst of her perplexities, Buckskin Joe came up. He listened to their story of the loss with silent interest, remaining lost in thought for some moments afterward, seeming to be turning some problem over in his mind.

"It's queer," he remarked, presently. "I don't know none of our chaps that I regards as mean enough to steal a woman's finery. It mought be somebody in the other train. I'll keep my eye out. Don't ye fret, Miss. If any feller in these two companies has got that ring, you'd better believe I'll track it. 'Twon't be long 'fore I'll be on the scent."

"Have you noticed that dark gentleman who brought us the antelope last night, Joe?"

"Noticed him? Yis; I noticed he wasn't one of the digging nor trapping kind. I reckon he is a-travelin' for his health. Some of them kind goes over the mountains now and then."

"I believe he has my ring."

"Snakes and painters!" ejaculated the guide; "I shouldn't have suspected him—at least, not at fust sight. Guess a wise feller wouldn't be in a hurry to tell him so to his face."

But, if I've cause to believe that he *has* got it, you'd better trust me to get it out of him. That was a mighty purty ring, Miss—it was most as bright as your eyes; and if I get it back for you, I s'pose you'll be ready to disremember that when you got into danger yisterday Buckskin Joe wan't up to the scratch."

The half-deprecatin', half-inquirin' tone with which he made this last remark was ludicrous enough, and the maiden burst into a merry laugh in spite of her tribulation.

"Wal, wal, laughin' don't hurt; but it's sot in my mind that I'll have a chance to make that up 'fore long."

"I do believe you'd be willing something terrible should happen to me for the sake of showing your bravery, Joe."

"I'd be willing suthin' should be *just a-goin'* to happen, jist to show you how easy I could purvent it," he retorted. "But now the fust duty in hand is to get an airy start. Be you ready to move on, Wright?"

"Nigh about ready, Joe—only one of my cattle seems about gone up. I'm afraid I'll have to kill him and leave him behind. It's just my luck."

"It's hard on critters goin' without water so, and half starved too. There's a couple more used up this mornin'."

"We must take one more good look for that ring," said Mrs. Wright. "Here, you boys, your eyes are sharp; you look too. I feel dreadful about it."

"I make no doubt that little thing was worth nigh onto ten dollars," sighed her husband. "It oughter have been Lizzie's wedding-ring. It's just our luck."

The last search proved as unavailing as the first. Two or three tears dropped from Elizabeth's eyes, as the trains finally moved on, for she felt as if the chances for recovering the lost treasure were exceedingly small.

"I've l'arned all there is to l'arn about that dark-complexioned chap," resumed Buckskin Joe, later in the forenoon, as he dropped alongside Wright's wagon. "It's just as I thought about his travelin' for his health. His name is Carolyn—Leger Carolyn, he writes it—a sort of a furrin'-lookin' name like himself. He's troubled with the liver-complaint or some other of them woman's ailin's that gentlemen take to, who are too keerful of theirselves; and now he's tryin' the nateral way o' livin' in the hopes of a cure. Boiled buffalo is excellent for dyspepsy—so's cold baked beans eaten with a chip out of an old stew-pan—and I reckon the Rocky Mountains will scare him out of his liver-complaints. I've bin noticing him considerable this mornin', and it strikes *me* that he's got more on his mind than he has on his stomach, though he's saller enough to show *that's* out o' fix. Lord, Miss, I've never seen the feller yet that could make my h'ar stand on end—but I'm blasted if I'd like to tell *him* he's got your ring—that is, unless I was certain he had; in which case, in course, knives and pistols couldn't

purvent my throwin' it up to him. I'm goin' to keep an eye on the company ginerally, and make no doubt I shall tree the thief if he's in these woods. Don't fret, Miss—for leastwise, if we don't rekiwer that ring, we're goin' where gold is plenty, and you shall have another as purty."

"But it won't be *that*—that was my mother's, you know, Joe."

"Was it now? Thunder and lizards! then we won't give it up nohow," responded the little guide, looking fierce, and marching along faster, for he could not bear to see the tears which sprung into the girl's eyes—he'd often swore he'd rather face a catamount than a cryin' woman.

The long day's journey was only a repetition of previous days, except that it was unusually dull and void of adventure. The plain grew more arid; there was no longer grass enough to tempt the bison; and no living thing varied the monotony of the way, except the curious villages of prairie-dogs, living in their sand-huts, and poking their queer, inquisitive noses out, to squeak and twitter at the travelers, and make Elizabeth laugh at their oddity.

"Wal, now, it does me good to hear you laugh out right smart ag'in," said Mr. Wright, "just as you did before we begun this desperate trip. You look like our Lizzie now, and not the tired little girl that's given her uncle the heart-ache for the last few days. If you knowed how much handsomer you look when you're full of fun!"

And truly if her face was a beautiful one in its resigned, almost dull melancholy, it was absolutely brilliant with light and color when it flashed out in mirth.

"I don't see the use of looking handsome here," replied she, with one of those arch sparkles of laughter beneath the long lashes which were all the more bewitching for being rare. "I don't care about aunt and yourself falling in love with me, any more than you are already, and old Joe is devoted enough to satisfy a more exacting person than I am."

"Supposing Nat Wolfe should ride up with us," said Mrs. Wright.

"Well?" queried the young girl, bending the full blaze of her eyes on her aunt. Hers was one of those reserved and queenly natures that could not endure even the well-meaning raillery of others on matters about which maidens are reticent.

"Oh, don't look at me so, and I'll never mention him again," laughed Mrs. Wright; and yet, in despite of her coolness, Elizabeth could not control the deepening crimson in her own cheeks.

Many times, that day, her eyes had searched the plain, hoping to see Golden Arrow speeding through the distance, his steed bounding lightly and his yellow hair streaming on the wind, as she had seen him yesterday.

But when the weary afternoon had rolled to the east, and the

company had camped, in the burning splendor of sunset, on the yellow desert, with only a half-hidden stream and a little line of stunted trees to make that spot more desirable than another, she still sat in the wagon, and looked through the molten air with a sad and searching look, in vain—Golden Arrow did not come.

While they were at supper, a party of vagabond Indians, some on mules and some on foot, came straggling about the camp, begging for hay for their mules and corn for themselves. The very sight of them took away Elizabeth's appetite: she sat, holding her little cousin, and feeding her, but she could not partake of the meal herself. Although assured that these dirty and miserable savages were neither able or disposed to do harm, that theft was the worst to be dreaded from them, she would not meet their snaky eyes for the world; she had an innate abhorrence of the race, such as most persons feel for serpents.

As she sat thus, inwardly shuddering, and looking at nothing but the child and the cup of biscuit and coffee she was holding for her, little Minnie cried out and hid her face in her bosom.

Elizabeth felt the shadow of some one between herself and the light, and raising her eyes met those of an Indian fixed intently upon her. He continued to gaze upon her, without speaking or asking for any thing she might have to bestow. He was tall and straight, but otherwise one of the most repulsive of the party, filthy beyond description and ragged in the few articles of tawdry finery he had contrived to obtain for his personal adornment. A bandage of cloth, originally white, passed across his upper lip and around his head; it was designed to conceal a wound which he had once received from an enemy in battle, and which his pride would never permit the eyes of his brothers to behold. Those silent, glittering eyes burned into the brain of the girl, so that she involuntarily closed her own, and when she overcame the feeling sufficient to again look up, the Indian was gone. She saw him mixing with others of his party, gesticulating, begging, eating the food given; but she drew a long breath of relief when the whole pack slunk off in the twilight, vanishing into the wide darkness of the plains.

The emigrants were not very well pleased with their present camping-ground; it was unprotected by any bluff, or even river-ledge, from the searching winds which were certain to blow at night, and which were all the more uncomfortable because of the heat and glare of the day. When this wind was high, it mocked the protection even of the covered wagons, whistling through every cranny, making the children shiver and the men wakeful, despite of blankets.

On this night, as if aware of the confusion it would cause to the adventurous intruders upon solitudes it had long held

possession of as its own, it came along more wrathfully than they had thus far experienced it. By midnight it had roused itself into a hurricane. Accustomed to the wild, unbroken sweep of these mighty plains, it rushed on, holding its sublime revel as heedless of the little encampment as of a feather in its path. Elizabeth was wide awake, sitting up in the wagon listening to the awful music, trembling with fear and cold; Mrs. Wright was wide awake, too; and her husband was leaning over the sleeping children as if he could protect them from the threatening storm.

Suddenly, with a roar as of a thousand waterfalls, the wind strengthened and whirled by, scattering the encampment almost to destruction. Wagons were tilted over and lifted bodily, their coverings rent into shreds, and their contents impartially disposed of. The accident was the more frightful because of the impenetrable darkness. The lowing of terrified cattle, and the shouts of the emigrants, mingled with the fury of the gale. There was no means of ascertaining the extent of the damage, except as the party could get together in the darkness. It was impossible to light fires; and for two hours they could not even obtain the light of a lantern. When this was done, they found one poor fellow killed outright by a blow on the temple from some flying object, and another groaning with a broken leg, unable to extricate himself from the wagon which had done the injury.

"Who in thunder's goin' to tend to this job?" muttered Buckskin Joe, as the sufferer was released from his trying position, and his limb examined by several who had gathered to his aid.

"I will," said a calm, decided voice, and looking up, he saw Mr. Carolyn, the gentleman whom he had favored with his morning's observations; he already had the injured leg in his grasp, and was handling it with the skill of a practiced surgeon. With the assistance of those whom he chose to aid him, he soon had the limb set and splintered, and the wounded man lying in comparative comfort upon a mattress of blankets spread behind the shelter of an overturned wagon. The violence of the wind had abated, so that there was nothing more to fear from it, though it still blew too wild and chilly for ease.

While they were yet in attendance upon the sufferer, Mrs. Wright made her way to Buckskin Joe, guided by the glimmer of the lantern.

"I can't find 'Lizabeth," she panted, catching his sleeve.

"Can't find her?—what's happened to her?"

"Wal, I'm sure I've no idea myself. I wish I had. You see the wind upset us; but it didn't do much harm, but to brise us up considerable. Jem's got a bump on his forrid, and Will's nose is bleedin'—"

"But where in thunder's the gal?"

"Wal, as I was saying, we don't know. You see we all

crawled out, after the wagon upset. I'm sure 'Lizabeth got out safe—she helped Minnie out 'fore I went myself; we all kept hold of hands, and stooped down behind the wagon as well as we could to keep the wind from blowin' us clear away. I guess it must have took her, for she didn't answer to our call, and she isn't nowhere very nigh—that's certain. It was awful—the wind was—and there's the children nigh about froze. I wish Timothy had staid to Missouri," and the poor woman's long-tried fortitude gave way, and she began to cry.

The stranger who had been busy about the broken limb, here turned abruptly to her, and asked:

"Have you searched with a light? Perhaps the cattle have trampled on her, or she is hurt in some way, so as not to be able to call out."

"The Lord forbid!" muttered Buckskin Joe.

"The wind took our lantern, I s'pose; we can't find it," said Mrs. Wright.

"Wal, I'm a-goin' for to find that gal," said Joe, catching up his lantern. "Let the traps go to darnation—the gal's worth more'n the hull lot. 'Sides, I've promised to be on hand next time she got into danger."

"You go in one direction, making the circuit of the camp, as near as you can guess it, and I will go the other until we meet," said the stranger. "It's impossible to make a fire just yet; but this wind will subside within an hour, so that we can then build one. If any one of the party are lost in the darkness, it will serve to light them back. Fortunately there is nothing to be feared from the desert, that I know of; and, unless she has been injured by flying missiles, the young lady is probably safe, and not very far off."

He said this with the cool decision which marked his general manner, yet the quick eye of the guide detected an uneasiness and paleness of countenance, caused either by his interest in the girl, and fear for her, or by the excitement of the scene he had just passed through.

So completely had the corral been broken and the camp scattered, that it was difficult to trace its exact position, or to tell just where it would be wisest to search for the missing girl. After an hour's wandering, assisted also by many others, the two men met, with no tidings. The wind having lulled, it was proposed to build a bright fire, in the hope that it would guide her back. This was done; the blaze streamed up vividly, enabling the emigrants to work with more certainty amid the ruins of their property. But no clue was obtained to the accident which had befallen Elizabeth.

Daylight brought to view a pitiable state of affairs. Two days of hard labor would barely enable the trains to proceed. Much property was irretrievably lost—literally scattered to the winds. There was the body of one—who yesterday was one

of their number, full of health and hope—now waiting its lonely burial beneath a stunted tree of the desolate plain. There was the injured man, to whom the rest of the journey must be a lingering and painful one. And, saddest perhaps of all, was the strange and total disappearance of the pride and star of the company—the sweet young maiden whose face had been like a memory of home to the roughest.

"This is what I should call suthin' of a pickle," soliloquized Buckskin Joe, leaning on his rifle, and looking off toward the rising sun, scratching his head instinctively to assist his thoughts; "if thar' had been sand enough lyin' about loose to swaller her up, or rivers, or woods, or even a Red River alligator, I should know where to look. Blast it! if it wur only an alligator, I'd fetch her out and bring her to—blast me, if I wouldn't! But I'm free to own that I'm mighty onsartain which way to look, cause all parts of the compass is 'zactly alike, and thar' ain't a mark so much as a blade o' grass for a sharp feller to fix his attention to. Now, if it wur the thickest woods that ever growed, and she'd bin stole by the slyest Injun, I'd have more hopes. 'Cause there'd be a bended twig, or a footstep in the leaves, or a bit of caliker on a bush, or *suthin'*. I can't see what could a' took her, lest the wind actually carried her off, which it mought do easy enough, for she was a light little critter—so purty—and if it did, it must have sot her down hard enough to take the breath out everlastingly." Here he fel' into a fit of silent abstraction.

"What are you thinking about?"

It was the dark stranger who startled the guide out of his reverie, by the abruptly-put question. The person addressed gave him a quick, keen look, before he answered:

"I was just thinkin' that some o' them pesky Injuns *may* have been sneaking about, stealing things last night, when the storm came up. They *may* have carried off the girl, under cover of the hurrycane, which they wouldn't a' done at a safer time. 'Tain't likely, but it's the only thing I can think of."

"I am afraid of it myself. Do you know what direction they would be most likely to take, in such a case?"

"Wal—yis! I rather guess I know some o' their lurkin places, stranger. I know all the whereabouts prtty much of that tribe that paid us a visit yesterday. By jingo, stranger, I'm off! I'll just put some biscuits and buffalo in my pocket, and be off. This train will have to stop here a couple o' days, sartain; and if I ain't back by that time they can proceed without me—that's all. Wish I had a hoss—but I must make a mule do."

"Not so," said the stranger. "I own two horses in my company. You shall have one, I will take the other, and we will go together."

You?" queried Buckskin Joe, in surprise.

"Yes. I am traveling for adventure, and what more novel adventure could I expect than to go after a lost maiden in company of the best guide this side of Kit Carson? Don't think I'll be a drawback to you. I'm an excellent shot."

"The sight of danger won't make *you* nervous, I'll be bound," said the guide, measuring the cool air and clear eye of his companion with a favorable glance.

Barely waiting for the needed refreshment of a cup of hot coffee, the two men, thus curiously thrown together on a doubtful venture, started out over the illimitable plain, burdened only with their weapons and a light wallet of provisions, and followed by the anxious eyes and hearts of the emigrants.

CHAPTER III.

DR. CAROLLYN'S BRIDE.

Love me with thy voice, that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush, that burns
When I murmur, *Love me!*—MRS. BROWNING.

A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.—TENNYSON.

NEARLY seventeen years before the emigrants of 1860 started on their long journey for Pike's Peak, a young physician of New York was one winter twilight making his way up-town, after a fatiguing round of visits, the number of which was evidence of his rising reputation. His elastic step betrayed health and spirits which no ordinary weariness could depress—indeed, there was a joyous eagerness in his manner which might almost betray to the passing stranger that he was a bridegroom returning to his bride. A husband of three months, for whom the honeymoon was still shining, going home to his own elegant house to meet a beautiful and affectionate wife—it was no marvel that his foot rung on the pavement with such an electric tread.

As he turned the corner of Broadway to go up Bleeker, then one of the fashionable streets, and the one upon which his mansion stood, the lamp-light flashed full in his face, and he felt his hand heartily grasped, at the same instant he extended it, and his own "My dear Maurice! is it possible?" cut short by the enthusiastic greeting of his friend.

"Yes, it's really me, myself. I'm just in on the packet from Havre—making my way home. Mother does not expect me for a month yet, and I'm going to give her a surprise. It seems

to me you're looking better than ever, Leger, and that's saying a good deal."

"That's my wife's fault."

"Your wife! You don't say you're married?"

"Didn't you receive my letter?"

"No! and mother certainly did not mention it in her last. Who is the happy lady—and how long since?"

"You remember Annie St John? Of course you do, for it was you who did me the favor to first attract my attention toward her."

"Annie St. John!" The tone of the young man had changed suddenly—all the warmth had gone out of it—it might be cold or surprised, or doubting or chagrined—a look of pity or contempt swept plainly over his countenance, but was presently banished.

The physician felt the momentary chill, but threw it off, without reflection, for his mind acknowledged no reason for it.

"I wish you joy—much, much happiness," continued his friend, presently, recovering his natural manner. "I came near to marrying Annie once myself. I never told you of that, did I?" with a light laugh. "But I must hurry on; I am delighting myself with the idea of just stepping in and taking a seat at mother's nice tea-table. Of course I shall come and see you—probably to-morrow."

The traveler hurried on toward the home from which he had been two years absent, and the young physician went forward, but with an uncomfortable feeling for which he could hardly account, except by the levity, the actual rudeness of his friend in his manner of speaking of his bride. Leger Carollyn was not the man to permit undue familiarity toward himself, and much less toward the woman he honored as his wife.

And, although Maurice Gurnell was the dearest and most confidential of his friends among his own sex, he felt the impulse to strike him when he spoke those hateful words with such careless gayety:

"I came near to marrying Annie once myself."

A few moments later brought him in front of his own handsome mansion, and his heart gave a bound which sent every unpleasant impression to the winds as he saw the glow of light through the unclosed shutters, and thought of the one who was awaiting him within. Admitting himself with a night-key, he stole through the spacious drawing-room to the boudoir, at the opposite end, where Annie was sure to be waiting, if, indeed, she did not spring at the lightest sound of his approaching step. She did not meet him to-day, but he saw her, sitting by the little ormolu table, and paused to enjoy a stolen glimpse of her loveliness.

Unconscious of observation, she had taken one of those

flower-like attitudes, half-drooping and inexpressibly graceful, peculiar to herself. She held a miniature in her hand, upon which she was gazing, the long lashes vailing her downcast eyes, her golden hair rippling around her throat. She wore a blue dress of some rich material—blue was her husband's favorite color, and it did set off the fairness of her shoulders and the rose-hue of her cheeks most daintily.

"How girlish she looks," he whispered to his heart, "and how pure! I do not see how I ever ventured to address her with the words of earthly passion, though the angels know there is more of heaven than earth in our love. My own Annie—my own wife!"

Blending with the odor of a japonica, leaning from a slender vase on the ormolu table, almost kissing the cheek of its human sister, came a refreshing breath of oriental perfume from the supper-room—the breath of the rarest Flower of Delight, steeping in its silver urn. The light, the luxury of his home diffused a sense of physical enjoyment through the physician's nerves, while the sight of his wife, in her fresh and innocent beauty, thrilled his spirit.

"How happy I am—how fortunate in every thing! Blessed Annie! in my absence she solaces herself with my picture;" and, thinking to call up the still frequent blush to her face by betraying her in this secret occupation, he stole softly and peeped over her shoulder.

It was not his own face upon which his eyes fell, smiling back at his bride from its framework of jewels—it was that of Maurice Gurnell. And he never knew before that she had such a miniature in her possession; yet now it flashed through his brain that he had seen that very locket in Maurice's own keeping a short time before he left for Europe, and that he, Maurice, had asked him if he thought the likeness good, for he had gotten it painted for his betrothed, if he should ever have one.

Just as these thoughts were printing themselves in letters of fire upon his blank mind, the breath which he caught with a gasp from his breast fluttered his wife's light tresses, and she pruned to her feet, with only a passing look of embarrassment. The next instant she laughed her girlish laugh, and threw her arms about his neck, kissing him twice or thrice without waiting to find if he kissed her in return. The locket at which she had been gazing had disappeared within the folds of her dress, slipped into her pocket, or, perhaps, into the bosom beating against his own.

Dr. Carollyn endured her embraces, but he did not return them; he stood like one in a dream—past, present and future swept over him like the storm-sand over a desert, obliterating all traces of what has been—changing the landscape so that he who had lived there a lifetime can not recognize a familiar feature.

It was Annie's arms that he felt about him, and Annie's words of welcome sounding in his ears. But who was Annie? Was she the wife in whose utter absence of guile of every kind he trusted as he trusted in God and immortality? or was it Annie, suddenly revealed to him in a character so different, that he felt toward her as toward a disliked and suspected stranger? His wife—yet his lip could not frame the word—his heart revolted at it.

"What is the matter, Leger? Are you ill?"

"No; only hungry."

She laughed; she was too accustomed to his affection to take offense now at some little passing cloud of ill-temper.

"I believe you are, and weary, too. But you needn't be cross about it. Come, tea has been waiting some time, I believe."

She led him by the hand into the cheerful supper-room, seating herself at the head of the table, and pouring out his tea with that air of dignity so pretty in youthful matrons.

"You said you were hungry, Leger, and yet you eat nothing."

"I meant that I was thirsty," and he handed back the cup which he had emptied at a draught.

As she prepared his tea he watched every graceful movement—he looked intently into the face beaming with happiness, searching for undiscovered lines about the temples and lips which might betray the guilty secrets hidden in her heart. That face still looked to him as pure as the unclouded heaven at noonday. If he could only believe it! if he could only give himself up to his past confidence again! Oh, God! if he *could*, he would resign at that moment every dollar of his wealth, every throb of his ambition, and stand with her, outcast from the world, on any remotest island of the sea.

"I was detained a few moments in the street," he observed, presently. "I met an old friend, just returning from abroad."

"Indeed?"

Her voice was pleasant—she showed interest, as she always did when he addressed her, but no agitation.

"Perhaps you can guess who it was?"

"I don't remember who of our friends are away, except Maurice Gurnell."

His keen look did not disconcert her; she seemed only a trifle surprised at his own manner. He exerted himself to appear natural; to force not only calmness but lightness—he did not speak nor look like a man on whose soul happiness was poisoning herself, ready to take flight forever.

"Perhaps you expected him?"

"Me? Not so soon—that is, not until—why, Leger, what do I know of your friend Maurice's proceedings?"

Her husband's eyes, with a strange and deadly glitter in them,

were fixed upon her face. She blushed, she stammered, she admitted that she was expecting him, and then attempted to withdraw from the admission. Pushing his chair back from the table, he said :

"I'm going out, Annie, to spend the evening. Don't sit up for me," and before she could spring to give him a good-by, or to help him with his muffler and gloves, he had seized his hat and coat, and the hall-door rung behind him.

Leger Carolyn bore a reputation for an unblemished moral character which added to the luster of his professional fame, and gave grace to his great mental accomplishments. But from boyhood he had been marked by two great faults, one of which, his unbending pride, was patent to every observer ; but the other of which few understood, being one which his pride would enable him to conceal, and which had but few opportunities for making even himself aware of its existence. This second defect, in his otherwise noble nature, was jealousy—a jealousy, strong and terrible, of others, who shared the right of, or who gained by favor, the love of those selected by himself for his devotion.

This peculiarity had been betrayed, when a child, in his family, and had been the subject of the wisest and gentlest treatment from his excellent mother. His only brother, two years younger than himself, had been a thorn in his side—not because he did not himself love him, nor because he was ungenerous toward him in any other respect—but because he was jealous of every token of affection bestowed on another by the parents he so passionately adored. The proud, reserved and thoughtful child could not call forth those little endearments which the more vivacious nature of his brother provoked, but he longed for them none the less.

However, the gay, handsome boy died—died in his twelfth year—and left Leger the sole idol of his parents. He mourned for his brother deeply, he reproached himself secretly with every unkind thought he had ever entertained—and yet, as the months rolled on, he was conscious that he was happier now that his path was no longer crossed by a rival in the love of his parents. So the fault lay in his nature, undeveloped but not exterminated. It was not a mean jealousy—that is, it never stooped to trouble itself about rivals in fame or position—he never did a dishonorable act toward a rival schoolmate—nor, in later days, threw obstacles in the way of, or judged selfishly, those striving for success in his own profession. It was only that when he loved, he wanted, in return for his own almost startling passion, the whole interest and devotion of its object.

A man of such character would not be apt to flutter among the young ladies of his circle of society, or to fix his choice lightly upon the woman whom he should select to become his wife. So it chanced that at twenty-five he was still unmarried.

At this time Dr. Carollyn, his father, passed away, leaving his son inheritor of the family-mansion, of the wealth which a long and lucrative practice had amassed, and of that practice itself, made valuable by the prestige of the parent's name. The mother had died nearly six years before, so that Leger Carollyn stood alone, with no relations either near or dear to him.

He had one friend, Maurice Gurnell, his classmate in college and his equal in society, a member of an old New York family of French extraction, and, as might be expected, the opposite in temperament of the young physician, possessing all the grace and gayety, the fluency of speech, and the love of the world which distinguishes his progenitors. Leger admired and loved his fascinating and brilliant companion, who esteemed and admired him in return; each being best pleased with those traits in the other most contrasted with his own.

While yet weighed down with deep melancholy by the loss of his father, Leger Carollyn was called, one night, to the bedside of a dying woman. The house to which he was summoned stood in a respectable, though not the most fashionable part of the city; the name he recognized as that of a family once well known to his father and always highly regarded by him, although much reduced from former affluence, and not mingling at all with general society for the past few years.

Leger himself had never been to the house, and knew nothing in particular of its inmates. His father had been their physician, and he was now summoned to fill the place of the departed. Upon entering the chamber of the sick lady, he saw at once that she was beyond the aid of humanity; she seemed, herself, to be aware of it, for she said, as he approached her bed:

"I am sensible that you can do nothing for me, Doctor. I would not have troubled you, if my child had not insisted upon it. Annie?"

At the call of that dying voice, strangely thrilling and clear, a young girl upon the opposite side of the bed raised her head from where it had been hidden in the pillow, and looked at him with eyes which asked the question her grieving lips refused to utter. She was the only relative by the bed of death—an old nurse dozing in a chair, and the servant who had admitted him, lingering by the door, as loth to go, being her only attendants.

As he looked at the forlorn young creature and met her despairing eyes, a feeling of pity, that was absolute anguish, seized upon the heart of Dr. Carollyn. The circumstances reminded him so vividly of his own recent bereavement, when he stood sole mourner by a parent's dying bed, that his deepest sympathies were aroused. He passed around to her side, and lifting her nerveless hand pressed it in his own, as he said, in answer to her mute appeal:

"You must resign your mother, my dear child; but God will still be with you."

The dying woman detected the tremble in his tone—it seemed as if some glimpse of the future revealed itself to her in that moment; she said, in the same clear voice:

“You are like your father, Dr. Carollyn. He was always one of my best friends. I hope that you will be a friend to my child, for she has not many. I am willing to trust her to you. She has neither father or brother. She will not be dependent, except for friendship. She is so young, so unused to doing for herself—ah, it is hard to leave you alone, my Annie, but I leave you with God. Annie—Annie—be calm I am.”

The Doctor saw that the final moment would soon arrive, and felt as if he ought not to leave that fragile young thing to bear the shock alone. He remained, until, in the gray dawn, the spirit left earth, and the desolate child sunk fainting into his arms.

When he had revived her, and restored her to the nurse, and to the female servant, who seemed much attached to her, he asked if there were no friends for whom he could send.

“Ah, botheration,” said the weeping servant, “there’s nobody nigher’n cousins, and they’re far away. But there’s friends and neighbors enough, as will come if they’re wanted. I’ll go for ’em meself.”

That morning Dr. Carollyn was aroused from the slumber into which he had dropped, after his night’s unrest, by the entrance of his friend, whom the servants had orders to admit at all seasons.

“In bed yet? Were you up last night? I’m glad I’m not a physician—I like my ease too well.”

“Yes, Maurice, I attended a dying lady last night. I’ve been dreaming about it. It was so sad. She left a daughter not more than sixteen, and without a relative in the world.”

“Was it any one we knew?”

“It was Mrs. St. John—her husband was a scientific man, and wasted much of their property in experiments. So I’ve heard my father say, who liked him very much—their tastes were similar.”

“St. John? and the daughter’s name is Annie? I know the family. Paul St. John has displayed many a chemical wonder to me, in days gone by, when I was a boy and used to steal visits to his laboratory. Annie was a wee thing, then, golden-headed and blue-eyed. I’ve met her occasionally of late days—she’s one of the sweetest flowers that e’er the sun shone on—and dark blue is her e’e, and for bonnie Annie St. John, I’d lay me down and dee. That is, I wouldn’t—for I’m not given to such things—but you would, Leger, after you’ve known her awhile. Yes,” he resumed after a pause, during which he had stood by the window in a reverie unusually long for his butterfly nature,

"Annie St. John is the girl for you, Leger. You are so exacting—you want the whole heart and soul of some woman, and she's just the one. She is situated like yourself—not a near relative to dispute your place in her affections. She'd worship you, I know she would—it's in her! By George, but she's beautiful; and she must be accomplished, for her mother was one of the rarest women I ever knew. Ha! ha! Leger, wouldn't it disappoint some of our brilliant belles, if you should go outside the conservatory and gather such a dainty flower?"

"Hush, Maurice, don't talk in this manner, while that poor young thing is breaking her heart beside her mother's corpse."

"It's not because I'm not sorry for her," said Maurice, more soberly. "But I saw such a pretty romance developing."

"As usual, you're building your castles out of nothing but air," responded his friend, gravely, and began talking of other subjects; and this one was never again resumed between them.

It was not many months after this that Maurice Gurneil resolved upon spending a year or more in Paris—his mother had relatives there, and the prospect was pleasing to one of his tastes. He tried hard to persuade Dr. Carrollyn to go with him, urging that the benefit and pleasure he would derive from a study of his science in Paris would amply repay him. But the doctor had, in his father's lifetime, spent a year in that city, and did not now feel like deserting his large circle of patients for so long a time.

There was, also, a dearer interest binding him; but of this, in the reticence of his proud nature, he as yet said nothing.

He was following up his acquaintance with Annie St. John. Under the sanction of that friendship which her dying mother had desired and which his universal reputation upheld, he was studying the mind and heart of the child-woman, and drawing her on, first to respect and confide in him, then to feel his strong nature a help and a necessity, then to fully and unreservedly love, to passionately adore him—even as he already fully loved and trusted her.

It was not until he felt certain that her soul was absorbed in his, that he spoke of his love to its object. The response he got was such as to satisfy his exacting nature. He had indeed no rivals, not even in the admiration of general society; for Annie, though fitted to shine among the fairest, a woman of whom he knew he should be proud, had lived a secluded life, owing to the tastes of her father, and the necessity of economy which he had occasioned even before his death. Her few friends were all among refined and cultivated people, who loved and appreciated her, but these were few and of the quiet kind. The small property left her kept her independently as a boarder with one of her mother's friends, and furnished her with a handsome *trousseau* when she came to prepare for her marriage.

When Dr. Carrollyn was known to be repairing and refurnishing

the family mansion, fitting it up richly with more than its pristine splendor, report said, of course, that it was for a bride. But who the bride was to be, not half-a-dozen persons knew, until she was presented to his friends in the drawing-room of her new home as Mrs. Dr. Carollyn.

Her beauty and accomplishments could not be caviled at by the most envious of disappointed belles—her family was unexceptionable, if not wealthy; and as for those lovely traits of character which made her what she was, the husband cared not to have the world guess at half her worth. It was enough for his pride that when in society she received the most distinguished consideration; and enough for his love, that at home she made him the happiest man in the world. The three months of their wedded life had been all that we like to imagine for youth and beauty, hightened by every favoring circumstance of worldly prosperity.

CHAPTER IV.

JEALOUSY.

All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven—

'Tis gone!

Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!

Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne

To tyrannous hate!

—Of one, whose hand,

Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away

Richer than all his tribe.—SHAKSPEARE'S OTHELLO.

It would seem to have been the plainest duty of Dr. Carollyn to have asked his wife, at once, how the miniature of his friend chanced to be in her possession, and to have received from her such explanations as she had to give, from which he might judge for himself. But when men are beside themselves with anger, love, jealousy, or any other mastering passion, they rush away from the simple, straight-forward dictates of common sense, striking blindly at whatever impedes them.

When he left the house his heart was on fire. He walked distractedly up one street and down another. No sooner would the vision of his wife, all purity, rise before him in its matchless beauty, than the memory of her hesitation, her blushes, and all the suspicious incidents of this evening would rush before it. A jealousy, before which all previous developments of it had been like the breath of morning before the midnight whirlwind, swept through him, leaving every thing joyful in his nature a prostrate ruin.

Yet he would be calm! He would not misjudge his friend,

much less would he misjudge his own wife! He would be calm—as cool and dispassionate as if he were a jurymen on trial of a stranger. He would wait, watch, and not in any manner change his usual ways, so as to excite the surprise of the interested parties. Oh no! he would not distrust his Annie, until the certainty of her deception made further trust in her impossible! And with feelings the gall of whose bitterness proved that he had already prejudged her, he set to himself the task of spy upon his wife.

It was midnight when he returned from his tramp through the chilly streets. Annie was sitting up for him, in their chamber, a loose robe thrown about her, and her bright hair, all unbound, rippling over her shoulders. His melting heart was hardened again, as he observed that her writing desk had just been pushed away from her, and that the locket lay in a half-closed drawer, with a letter she had just sealed. He had not known of her having any correspondents, aside from occasional complimentary notes to and from friends in the city. The face of the envelope lay up, and his lightning glance devoured the address—Mademoiselle Victoire Gurnell.

"There is no Gurnell of that name," he cried to himself. "Maurice's sisters are both married, and he has no cousins in this country. Of course I should know of them. What a flimsy disguise! A secret correspondence under an assumed name! Was ever man so betrayed?"

"I have been so lonely," said the young wife, closing the drawer with one hand, as she laid the other on his own. "It's the first evening you have left me so long; but I presume you and Maurice were talking over old times—so I excuse you. Why, Leger, your hand is as cold as ice!"

"Your constancy will warm it," he said, with a laugh.

It was a hollow laugh, with a strange ring to it; but the pretty wife was sleepy, though she would not have owned it possible, and she did not observe its peculiarity. In ten minutes she was slumbering peacefully. Her husband had laid himself by her side; as soon as her regular breathing announced that she was sleeping, he slipped from the bed. Twice and thrice he paced the room, approaching the little writing-desk at every turn, and again shrinking away. Never in his life had Dr. Carollyn done a dishonorable act; yet now he was hesitating about a deed from which his honor recoiled. The jealousy which mastered him soon put an end to the mental contest; he softly opened the unlocked drawer, drew forth the letter, carefully broke the seal, took out the folded sheet, and read:

"DEAR VICTOIRE—Be patient and hopeful. All is going well. You will soon be the happiest of the happy. I will meet you to-morrow afternoon at the place we appointed.

"ANNIE."

He returned the note to the envelope and resealed it with such caution as to leave no trace of what had occurred to it.

Mrs. Carollyn would certainly have noticed the haggard appearance of her husband, carefully as he strove to appear well and happy, if her own mind had not been unusually preoccupied. When they came to the breakfast-table, she forgot to put sugar in his coffee, and made several little mistakes about which he should have rallied her, if they, also, in his mind had not been "trifles light as air," which were, to him, "confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ."

"I've been thinking," she said, as she followed him into the study, where he usually spent an hour after breakfast before going to his office, "that it would be pleasant and proper to give a party in honor of Maurice Gurnell. We expected to give one soon, in return for the abundance showered upon us, and this appears to me a charming occasion. What do you say, Leger?"

"I say so too, Annie. Give him a party, by all means!"

"Shall we have it a splendid affair, darling? Do you give me *carte blanche*? Sit down here, and tell me something of how you would like it to be, for I'd like to get out my invitations to-day—we ought to have it as soon as possible."

"I've no time to spend on such matters. There are the sick and dying waiting for my advice. Arrange your festival as you please. Only have it as magnificent as it should be—don't fail to have it magnificent! When the burning building crushes to its fall it always gives out the brightest blaze of splendor." And he left his paper unread, hurrying from the house.

"Leger is certainly a little *distract* this morning. He's worried to death with his practice; he doesn't get rest enough. Oh dear, I wish he were not so good a physician—or else that so many people wouldn't get sick," and the young wife knitted her fair brow, perplexed to think people would fall ill in this bright, beautiful world, and wondering what she should first set on foot to bring affairs out right in the briefest time.

"If Leger only knew my object in giving this party! But Maurice wishes to surprise him as well as the rest of the world. I don't wonder they accuse women of being unable to keep a secret; I'm sure it's hard for me to keep mine away from my darling. Ah, if he only knew—I've *two* secrets—but I shan't tell him the dearest one until all this confusion of the party is over," and with a blush too lovely to have been wasted in that solitude, she lost herself in a smiling reverie.

"I've been so busy," she cried, as she flew to meet her husband, as he came home to tea—he had not been in since morning—"and have accomplished so much! I had the notes all written by four o'clock, with a lady friend to help me. I sent Stephen out at noon with the first half of them, and the

others are delivered by this time I presume. I was glad Mr. Gurnell did not come in until that part of the work was done, as I wished to get them out to-day. He's just gone, five minutes ago. It's set for Thursday evening—only two days; but I've ordered the refreshments from Thompson's, and we've nothing to do but arrange the rooms. Shall we have real flowers?"

"Real flowers? Oh, yes; nothing false about our entertainment—no mockery of pleasure! I believe in having things what they seem to be; don't you, Annie St. John? These snow-white lilies and japonicas—they will be most appropriate."

"Yes, for a bride, they will be," was the innocent answer. "How like old times it sounded to hear you call me by my maiden name!" guessing little that he had called her that, because he had denied her the name he had bestowed upon her.

As she leaned her head against his breast, he smoothed the hair which glittered beneath his hand. If every separate shining strand had thrilled him with electric fire, he could not have been more profoundly moved. He loved this woman—this wife of his—loved her more desperately than before he doubted her; he could not refrain his hand from that caress if he had known that she was steeped in falsehood. The next moment he tore it away, as if the touch of that silken head had burned him.

"Then you did not go out this afternoon?" he asked, presently.

"No; I was intending to, but I had not time. I sent for Thompson to come here for my orders."

"It would be better for your health if you went out every day."

He was glad when company came in, after tea. It prevented Annie from noticing his mood—it freed him from her distracting endearments. Maurice Gurnell was among the visitors. He staid until the others had all gone, giving his friend a vivid and eloquent account of what had befallen him, what he had seen, done and heard in the last year-and-a-half. Dr. Carollyn's manner was always so quiet, that the young man noticed nothing unusual about him; but when he had nearly exhausted his resources of foreign gossip, he rose, with a gay laugh.

"You look tired, Leger, and I don't wonder, the way I've rattled on. I must beg Mrs. Carollyn's pardon for engrossing you so long. It seemed so pleasant to be talking away at you again. I say talking *at* him, Mrs. Carollyn, for I always had to do all the active part of our conversations."

How easy and graceful was his manner—how free from any appearance of acting a part! Leger looked at the radiant face, the enchanting smile of his handsome friend, so bright, so changeable, so fitted to win the admiration of women, and cursed himself as a dark, severe, repelling man, whom the fickle sex could find nothing in to really love.

As Maurice gave his hand to Mrs. Carolyn in saying good-night, Leger, standing apart, and seeming to be arranging a book on the table, was certain that he heard a whispered sentence, though he could not make out its import.

We need not dwell minutely upon the two days of intolerable torture which intervened between this and the evening of the party. Dr. Carolyn had wrestled with himself, and had almost thrown the demon of jealousy which was invisibly tearing him. The last few hours he had enjoyed comparative peace. He could have gone down on his knees and begged pardon of the wife he had been wronging in his thoughts, when she came into the study to look for him, to get his opinion of her dress, and to tell him it was time to take his place beside her in the front saloon, to receive their guests.

Whether it was because her apparel was really so becoming, or whether the intensity of his feelings heightened every effect, certain it is that she had never appeared so beautiful to him—not even on the wedding-day. She wore a blue velvet dress, with the pearls which had been his bridal gift. A wreath of matchless japonicas circled the golden coils of hair at the back of her head, while a few glimmering ringlets shadowed her cheeks and throat, exquisite in contour and color.

He had reason to remember every minutest detail of dress, looks and action, for the picture at that moment stamped upon his heart was destined to glow there during long and desolate years, unobscured by any more recent impressions. He sprung to his feet and kissed her.

"You admire me, then?" she said, with a happy smile.

"You are looking beautifully, Annie."

The bell rung, and they hurried through the glittering and perfumed vista of rooms, to take their place at the upper end. For a couple of hours a stream of gay people poured into the saloons. It was destined to be a brilliant party; for, in addition to the luxury of the apartments, the host and hostess were in just that mood which made their guests most delightful.

"A wife improves Dr. Carolyn. I never saw him so brilliant," remarked everybody.

When the tide of pleasure was at its height; when all had arrived and the music was loudest, the dancers whirling; when the heat and light had called out the full perfume of the flowers not yet beginning to wither, a shadow fell upon Dr. Carolyn. His wife had disappeared; so had Maurice Gurnell, who had been flashing his wit and mirth amidst the company collected in his honor. Striving to conquer his uneasiness, Leger waited, while moment after moment rolled away, to him like hours.

"Perhaps they have gone to look at the supper-table;" and unable to resist his maddening suspicions, but trying to believe that he was not suspicious, he descended to the supper-room,

where the last touches were being given by skillful servants to the elegant table.

Again he passed through the thronged apartments, through the dancing saloons, into the conservatory, the little study, out upon a little balcony, chill with the winter twilight. They were in none of these. He ascended to the dressing-rooms, passing on until he reached his wife's chamber—that sacred, secluded room, into which he never entered unbidden. He paused before the door with an icy heart and hand. He heard voices—*his* voice and *hers* in earnest conversation; he heard him say:

"And now, Annie, before we go, let me thank you again and again for all you have done for me."

"Let us hasten," was the low reply, "before Leger misses us. Oh, dear! he will be so surprised."

The chill left the listening husband, and a hot fever of rage took its place. Flinging the door wide open, he stepped in.

"Not so surprised, madam, as you may think. I have guessed at your secret days ago."

Annie was about to make some answer to this; but when she met his eyes, she grew white and said nothing.

"As for you, Maurice Gurnell, I will not kill so mean a man as you. I will not even strike so base a thing. Only take *her* with you, and get out of my presence forever;" and with a slight, contemptuous gesture toward his wife, he turned upon his heel.

"Stay!" cried Maurice; "you are mad, Leger. Let us explain;" but he continued down the hall, till Annie, with a faint cry, sprung to his side, grasping his arm.

"Leger Carolyn!"

He flung off her hand, and she shrunk back into her chamber; but before he had reached the turn in the hall which led to the dressing-rooms, a slight figure, robed in white, with a long veil sweeping about the floating drapery, sprung before him, seized both his hands, and commenced talking rapidly in French—so rapidly, that he, not of late days very familiar with the sounds, hardly understood her, but he was compelled to hear enough to rivet his attention.

"Ah! you do not understand," she cried, half-laughing, half in tears. "I am Victoire. Maurice is not a bad man—no, no you must not call him so. He is my husband—ah me, this very day. Your sweet, angel wife, she help us—it was her own good pastor marry us this day. It was your wife who kept it secret—because, you see, I was in the convent—and I run away. I run away and came across the sea to wait for Maurice—that is t, because we love each other so. He was my cousin. Come; your sweet, pretty wife said we should have a wedding party, and surprise them all. Come; we must go down. Ah me! I tremble so, to think of it!"

The pretty creature, all childish animation, pushed him back

with eager gesture, to the chamber he had left in such a tumult. An infant could have led him, the reaction had left him so unresisting. Maurice met him at the threshold, saying, gravely:

"I forgive your too hasty words, Leger. It was foolish of me to try to keep my little plan a secret from you; but I thought the surprise would be pleasant. In five moments I can tell you all that is now necessary with regard to Victoire. She is my cousin once removed. Her mother's family live in Paris. When I went to see them, Victoire was at school in a convent. Her mother was extremely religious, and, having married two daughters comfortably, had resolved that this one should enter a nunnery. She gave me permission to call upon my cousin at the convent. I did so. Notwithstanding the icy presence of the lady-superior, we contrived to fall in love with each other. Look at her, Leger, and you will not wonder! I went back and proposed to my aunt for her daughter's hand. She rejected the idea. I could not soften her. Of course, the more I was opposed, the more passionate became my resolution. I contrived to correspond with Victoire; I laid a plan for her to escape from the convent, and take passage in the vessel which was to sail the month before I left. This I did to avert suspicion and pursuit. Of course if they saw me still in Paris, they would know she had not fled with me; and if they looked for her in connection with me at all, they would confine their search to the city. She accomplished her flight in safety; the captain of the vessel, a friend of mine, took her in charge. Not wishing to send her to my own family (knowing they would oppose the match bitterly, and probably return her to her mother), I bethought me of Annie St. John, the woman of all my acquaintance I most respected and admired, and I gave Victoire letters to her in which I begged her to take charge of my poor little blossom and keep our secret in her own breast until I arrived, and our marriage was safely consummated. She found the lady married, but she had heard me speak of you too often not to feel the same confidence in her as before. She came to your house with her letters, and her poor little lonely heart frightened and trembling; but she was not willing Mrs. Carolyn should even tell you her story, which was a little foolish. Mrs. Carolyn obtained board for her with the same lady in whose family she herself resided before her marriage, keeping watch and ward over her until I arrived to relieve her of the charge. She thought it a pretty plan to give us a wedding-party. With the sanction of her presence and approval, your pastor married us privately this afternoon. And now we are ready to face the whole curious, condemnatory, applaudatory and astonished world, are we not, little girl?" And with a look of tender fondness Maurice turned to the young creature, shy but happy, clinging to his arm. "Come, Dr. and Mrs. Carolyn, give us the support of your countenance through this trying ordeal."

Leger offered his arm to his wife. She did not take it, but walked by his side, with a strange luster in her pale face—a fixed, resolute expression, that did not change through the evening. With admirable dignity she introduced the bride and bridegroom to the surprised assemblage, his own relatives included.

The supper was a marvel of costly luxury. It was late when the dancers tired, the music faltered, and the house was gradually left to solitude. Mr. and Mrs. Gurnell had been previously invited to spend a week with their hostess, and their chamber awaited them. Mrs. Carolyn left them at its door with a pleasant good-night.

When the Doctor knocked at his wife's door, his heart drenched in tears of humble regret, she did not respond to the summons, and he retired to await the subsiding of her just displeasure.

But when she was summoned to the late breakfast, her room was found empty. Nothing was disturbed. The blue velvet dress lay on the bed. A traveling-dress and bonnet was gone from the wardrobe. The casket of pearls was on the bureau. Of all her wealth she had taken nothing but a sum of money—amounting to a few hundred dollars, which had come in from her property—and her wedding-ring. Since she was a wife, and might possibly some time become a mother, she had kept her wedding-ring—and, yes, her marriage-certificate. One of the servants said he had heard the door open and close, very early in the morning, but he was very sleepy, from having been up so late, and had paid no attention to it.

And from that time, for weary, heart-withering years, Dr. Carolyn obtained no clue to the fate of his wife.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUNTER AND THE MAIDEN.

And still thy mane streams backward
At every thrilling bound,
And still thy measured hoof-stroke
Beats with its morning sound!—BAYARD TAYLOR.

Now he shivers, head and hoof, and the flakes of foam fall off,
And his face grows fierce and thin!
And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go.

MRS. BROWNING.

FOR once Nat Wolfe was disappointed in his best friend—his long-tried, much-lamented steed, Kit Carson. All the long afternoon he pursued the northerly course which the bison had taken, and which, he knew, led to more fragrant streams and

better pasturage. The same moon toward which Elizabeth, riding merrily in the ox-drawn wagon, was looking with such longing eyes, found him still striding on, throwing keen glances in every direction, but without having met a living thing of any kind in his six hours' journey. He was certain that he was on the track of the herd; and, more than that, frequently, before it grew too dark for such observations, he detected the print of horse-shoes here and there along the way. As long as the moon shone he continued to walk; but when it set, there was nothing to do but to eat his dry biscuit, take a draught from his canteen and lie down to sleep with a tuft of grass for a pillow. This he did, still feeling confident that when he awoke it would be to find Kit grazing quietly by his side.

The first rays of the morning roused him. He had slumbered heavily, for he was fatigued; and as he tried to shake off the chill and stiffness of his night's exposure by running swiftly, he remarked to himself:

"Well, I may as well run in the right direction, and that is, toward the point I started from. Poor Kit's gone forever, I fear. I must get back to the trail, in order to follow the route to Denver. I'll have to foot it all the way, unless I overtake some train that'll be willing to sell me some kind of an animal. I wouldn't have taken a thousand dollars for Kit Carson! Confound me if I think the girl was worth it!"

Yet, at the recollection of the maiden in whose behalf he had sacrificed his horse, a sudden warmth thrilled through his veins, very beneficial in dispelling the effects of the night air; he slackened his speed insensibly, forgetting his breakfast for some time in visions of a young, wistful face, with eyes so lustrous and yet melancholy that they made his heart yearn to fill them with smiles instead of tears to which they seemed more accustomed.

"It's a burning shame in that shiftless farmer to be dragging that kind of a child out to Pike's Peak—an infernal hole for men, at the best. She don't feel at home, poor thing, that's evident! Her place is with the ladies of the land—instead of being set down in a shanty among a crowd of rough, swearing miners. She needs a protector, that child does—blast me if she don't." Here a thought rushed through his mind which deepened the flush of his sun-burned cheek. Presently he shook his head, continuing, "No! no! it's too late for that with Nat Wolfe. A man that's been fooled by a woman as I was, would be a double fool to trust one of the kind again."

Coming to a pool of water in a deep gully, Nat refreshed himself with the remains of his dried meat and biscuit, filled his canteen with water, and pushed on. It was noon when he reached Pike's Peak trail—at almost the spot where he left it. There were no travelers in sight.

"I must overtake that train again. It's going my way, and

—and—I shan't just feel easy without seeing that girl again. I'm a good match for an ox-team; but when it has at least twenty miles the start, that makes it harder. I'll be likely to be hungry before I reach the next station, if I don't come across a stray buffalo or antelope, and we're about out of their range now. However, it's too early in the day to borrow trouble. I've been fifty hours without food, more than once."

With long, steady, gliding steps, which took him over the ground with surprising rapidity, yet which had not the appearance of haste or effort, he continued his march, reaching the place at which the emigrants had stayed the previous night, before sundown. Here he was fortunate enough to find, among other relics of their encampment, some of the remains of their breakfasts. He did not pause to scrupulously examine the nicety of these fragments; for he had eaten nothing since early morning, and was very glad of these providential crumbs. Having somewhat rested and refreshed himself, he had about concluded to push on, until nine or ten in the evening, so as to come up with the train by evening of the next day. It was now after sunset. As he arose to resume his journey, he perceived, afar, against the northern hemisphere of the horizon, a party of horsemen sweeping on; he knew them, even at that distance, by their attitudes and manner of riding, as a band of Indians.

"They'd like right well to know I was here, alone and on foot," soliloquized Nat, "though I doubt then if they'd care to approach me, when I was wide-awake and looking out for them. Let 'em come! the whole snaky set! I suppose it would be just as prudent not to show myself until they are out of sight; though if they come where I am, I'm agreeable! I'd like to dislodge a red-skin from one of those horses, and take his place. Perhaps they'll camp here for the night. Ha! here they come; I'd better be looking out for a covert."

He crept along the ground and dropped down the embankment into the river-bed. Here he could conceal himself from observation, unless the party stopped for the night, or came for water. In case he was discovered before the twilight enabled him to escape, he had only to depend upon his weapons, and the dauntless courage which had made him so famous.

It was true that most of these vagrant bands of red-skins were not at war with the whites; but their natural cruelty and covetousness would lead them to murder any solitary traveler they might chance upon; and toward Nat Wolfe they all felt the fury of revenge for the frequent losses they had sustained from him.

As the tramp of the approaching horses drew nearer, he raised his head cautiously and reconnoitered. "They're a well-mounted set of devils—plenty of 'em, too, I'll swear!" he muttered; and seeing a bush hanging over the bank a little further

down, which would afford him a better chance to make observations, he crawled on his hands and knees along the yellow clay until he came to the spot over which it grew. This new position was a safer one in this respect—it was around a bend of the stream; so that if the Indians came to dip water from the half-dried pool above him, they would not observe him where he lay, sheltered by the bend; the ground above, also, shelved over, so that he stood a good chance of escaping their keen eyes. Looking well to his trusty rifle, and mechanically feeling the knife and revolvers in his belt, he pressed as closely as possible under the bank and listened until the party drew rein, as he had anticipated they would, and dismounting made preparations for encamping for the night. Nat's trail was so mixed up with that of the company who had occupied the ground the previous day that the new-comers perceived nothing to arouse their suspicions.

It was extremely irksome to Golden Arrow to lie crouched under the bank all the time the new-comers were kindling their fires, broiling their venison and feeding their horses such forage as they had; he had rather have darted upon them like the weapon after which they had named him; but, brave as he was, he knew that one white man was a poor match for thirty Indians, and he restrained his hatred and impatience as best he could; varying the tedium with the rather dangerous amusement of raising himself to watch them behind the shelter of the bush. The two hours which they spent, before they finally stretched themselves in a ring with their feet to the ashes of the fire they had made, seemed to him endless. They had secured their horses by tying a knot in the end of the ropes about their necks, and burying these knots in the earth of the prairie, in lieu of trees to tie them to. Twilight had deepened into the wan moonlight of a chilly night before all was so quiet as to warrant Nat's attempt to escape from his present unfriendly proximity. Quietly creeping along the river-bed, until out of hearing distance of any wakeful ear, he finally stood up, climbed the bank, and struck across the desert—as the stream took him away from instead of toward the track he intended to find and follow.

Nothing interfered with his intentions, and he was soon traveling briskly along the trail, which the descending moon enabled him to follow. For an hour he made good progress; but as the moon went down the wind arose, and soon that terrible tempest which was working such destruction in the camp of the emigrants came upon him also, defying his utmost efforts to hold his own against it. Not a rock to shelter him, not a shrub to cling to, and wrapped in impenetrable darkness, all he could do was to fling himself flat upon the ground, shut his eyes, and let the winds trample him at their pleasure. During all the first fury of the tornado he lay thus; when it had

somewhat abated he arose and struggled on against it. His only guide was the fact that the wind had come from the direction in which he wished to go; so he now set his face against it, feeling his way through the starless night. But the wind has the reputation of being fickle, and it is not surprising, therefore, that when the wished-for morning began to break, Nat Wolfe found himself, instead of several miles on the way toward friends, back in the camp of the enemy.

The Indians were already stirring, on the alert to discover what losses they had sustained by the storm. Nat, fearing discovery on the open plain, again took to his hands and knees, creeping along to seek for some shelter in the bed of the stream until the party should have mounted and ridden off. Scarcely had he gained a secure position, with a friendly shrub again giving him an opportunity to reconnoiter, when he perceived another band of mounted men swiftly approaching from the west, along the Denver trail. That these, too, were red-skins, and a part of the former party, he at once decided; but great was his surprise to perceive that one of the savages rode his own lost steed, Kit Carson.

His astonishment was swallowed up in a still greater emotion the next instant; trained as he was to the suppression of all outward signs of excitement, he could scarcely repress a cry, at perceiving, bound to a pony, which was led by the rider of his own horse, a white captive whom he recognized as the very young girl whom he had rescued from the bison. The east was now golden with the coming sunrise, and as the party drew nearer he plainly observed the face of the captive—that young, beautiful face—now so pale with terror and fatigue, as to excite his deepest pity. The storm had blown the polished braids of her hair into streaming tresses which rippled about her form in dark waves. She was quiet, for her hands were tied, and effort was hopeless; but her features had an expression of dread and anguish impossible to depict. Nat remembered her pitiful avowal to him of her extreme horror of Indians, and his stern heart shook with sympathy, as he noted the still despair—aversion of her look. The one who led her pony Nat recognized too—a dirty, repulsive savage upon whose face he had once inflicted a wound, in a battle between the settlers and red-skins years ago, and who had since concealed the marks of his disgrace with a bandage. This fellow evidently knew that he was riding Golden Arrow's horse; he was in high spirits, as he galloped along, forcing the smaller pony which he led, into doing its best to keep up with him. As the party swept by within two rods of where he crouched, Nat's eyes almost met those of Elizabeth, who turned an eager, piercing gaze at the bush, as if her mind or senses had detected the presence of a friend. The two companies now met; the new arrivals would not dismount, making such gestures toward the

girl, and the path they had come over, that Nat easily understood they were afraid of pursuit, and were resolved to press on to some more distant ground, before pausing for rest. The others, acquiescing in this, mounted their horses, only pausing to water them at the stream. During this brief interval of grace Nat Wolfe had to make up his mind whether or not there was any thing to be done for the salvation of that poor child whose beauty and distress alike appealed to all the bravery, all the daring and chivalry of his nature.

It was one man, on foot, against forty mounted devils, who, however cowardly some of them might be under equal chances, would be fired with exultant ferocity by the advantages of the occasion. And, however willing he might be to throw away his own life in the effort to preserve the maiden, he felt that any failure on his part would only hasten her fate. All these thoughts rushed through his brain in the brief time he was given for reflection; but his pulse remained as steady, his eyes as cool and quick as ever in his life; indeed, all his faculties, while they intensified in power, gathered to his aid like soldiers rushing to the call of their leader.

If he could have given Elizabeth warning of his proximity, so that she would have been prepared to take advantage of any momentary opportunity, it would have been increasing the chances of success, but she was too lost in dread and too hopeless of succor, to be on the look-out for friends in this unlikely spot. She did frequently turn her head and gaze off over the track they had passed, as if with some hope of the emigrants sending aid, and after such a fruitless search over the desert road, would drop her head despairingly. Once, while all the Indians were busy among themselves, and she seemed to be looking toward the bush behind which he knelt, he ventured to raise his hand an instant. Whether she perceived the signal he could not decide; she certainly started, lifting her head with so eager a motion that her savage captor turned toward her sharply, when she immediately resumed her drooping attitude.

The one narrow chance which Nat saw, was to kill the rider and secure his horse, who, he knew, would bound to him at the first call. If he could do this before they wreaked a sudden revenge upon the girl, he hoped to seize her and to fight his way free of the band. It would be as good as a miracle if they should indeed get away without injury from the shower of shot which would be poured upon them, as the Indians, more than half of them, had guns.

"Kit knows I'm somewhere about," muttered the hunter, as his horse began to grow restive—so restive that the red robber could hardly retain his seat in the saddle. "I wouldn't give that horse for all the human friends you could give standing-room on this prairie."

That instant the animal made a plunge which compelled his rider to loosen his hold upon the pony's rein or lose his own equilibrium—he dropped his hold upon the captive, and in three seconds Nat had pulled trigger upon him. Simultaneously with the crack of his rifle the shriek of the dying savage rung upon the air as he leaped from the saddle, and fell headlong to the earth. Before the astonished enemy could comprehend what had happened, with a sharp, low cry to his steed, Golden Arrow sprung full into sight, appearing to their superstitious gaze to have dropped from the sky. Kit needed no second signal. With a joyous whining he bounded to meet his master, who was upon his back before one of the savages had presence of mind to attempt retaliation. In half a moment more he had snatched the girl from the rope which bound her to the pony, flung her across his horse's neck, to whom he gave an encouraging whistle, and turned to fly, with the whole pack, now yelling with hate and fury, upon his track. Into the bed of the stream Nat guided his horse, whose immense leaps, doubly burdened as he was, showed his almost human sagacity in the consciousness of deadly peril. More than twenty bullets whistled above and around them. Nat felt one cut the rim of his cap, while another grazed his leg as it plowed through his leather breeches. Whether any struck the frail form hanging over his saddle-bow, he had no time to see—only there was neither motion or cry. A few rods more placed them under the protection of a rise in the bank, from whence he could act upon the defensive; here, sheltered from their aim, he wheeled in the saddle and shot down his nearest pursuer. Three or four more came recklessly on, but as many shots from his revolver sent them dead to the earth, or wounded and yelling back again. Finally the whole troop paused and backed out of rifle-range, where they seemed to be holding a consultation. With all possible speed Nat reloaded his rifle—he had yet two charges in his revolver—then, patting his horse, gave him rein, and with a shout of triumph, flew off over the plain in the direction of the trail to the West. He feared nothing now, for he had a little the start, and there was no animal in the group behind that could distance Kit Carson. Of this the red-skins were as well aware as he; looking back, he perceived they were not attempting pursuit, but were sullenly gathering about their killed and wounded companions.

It was well for the escaped whites that this was the result. For a while, Kit galloped on with fierce energy; but suddenly, and while they were yet almost within sight of the enemy, he began to fail and stagger.

"What is it, Kit? What is it, my beauty?" questioned his owner, stroking his neck, and speaking as softly as to a lady. "He is hurt—bleeding—poor Kit!" he cried, as, stooping, he perceived for the first time the life-blood flowing from a wound

in the chest received by the noble animal. "We must dismount and see what we can do for him."

The slackened speed and the voice of her preserver aroused Elizabeth; she lifted herself from the neck to which she was clinging, and comprehending what had happened, slid to the ground. Nat, with evident distress, dismounted and examined the wound.

"Poor Kit, we can do nothing for you," he cried.

"Take this—perhaps you can stanch the blood," said his companion, taking off her apron.

He tried to bind up the wound, but his efforts were of no avail—he had only time to relieve him of the saddle before the faithful steed sunk shivering upon his knees and rolled over upon his side.

"We have not even a drop of water for him," said Nat, in despair.

With a most pitiful, touching look of affection, the dying eyes of the horse were fixed upon those of his master, who knelt beside him, caressing and talking fondly to him. In a few moments all was over—Kit Carson was dead.

The grief of his master was such as Elizabeth had not expected in so hardy and self-possessed a character. With his face bowed upon the proudly-arched neck now stiffening in death, Nat Wolfe remained silent, lost in sorrow, not even looking back to be sure of his own safety from lurking enemies. She saw how manfully he strove to restrain himself, but how, in despite of his efforts, the breath came harder and more labored until great sobs shook the breast of the brave stranger who had twice periled life in her defense, and whose loss and trouble now had been occasioned by his rescue of herself.

A little while Nat's face was hidden, ashamed of the tears which flowed as a tribute to the memory of a friend the noblest and truest, whose life had been given a sacrifice to crown years of faithful and intelligent servitude—a little while, and then his face was lifted up by a pair of small, soft hands; eyes glistening with tears of sympathy met his, and a kiss fell upon his forehead. As she would have comforted her uncle had she seen him in distress, the innocent child, moved by pity, remorse and gratitude, strove to comfort the person she had brought into this trouble—only the shyness, the sweet modesty which she herself scarcely understood, made her actions the more lovely. The timid touch and kiss, the sight of the fair face full of womanly solicitude, thrilled the hunter's heart with a fire which his companion little dreamed of kindling. It was a propitious moment for a new feeling to steal in and usurp the place of the desolate, friendless sense of loss which afflicted him. The little brown hand crept into his.

"It is all my fault. If it had not been for me, he would not

have been killed," said Elizabeth, sadly. "I am so sorry—so sorry—and yet—ah, sir, if you had not come what would have been my—" she could not finish the sentence—a shudder shook every fiber of her frame.

"He could not have died in a better cause. I would have sacrificed Kit twice over to save you, so you must not blame yourself," he said, becoming in his turn the comforter. "We are hardly safe yet," he added, looking uneasily to the east. "If those prowling scoundrels should discover our loss, they would be after us with a vengeance. I will look well to my arms, and then we will take up our march without delay. Poor child! how do you think you can stand thirst, hunger and fatigue? I will try to shoot some stray game before night; but it's scarce here, I can tell you, and we may not find a drop of water till we get to the next station."

"I do not fear any thing in the world but those hateful Indians," was the reply. "I had rather starve to death in the desert, than to ever see one again. Oh, sir, let us get as far from them as we can."

He laughed at the beautiful, frightened eyes, lifted so confidently and appealingly to his own.

"I don't wonder they make you nervous, little girl. Wait until I cut a lock of hair from Kit Carson's mane, and we will speed along. Poor Kit, good-by!"

"Cut a lock for me, too," whispered Elizabeth.

Tears were in the eyes of both as they took their last look at their murdered friend; but the presence of still imminent danger, and the necessity of losing no time in seeking their party before their strength should be exhausted, admonished them to linger no longer. Under a burning sky, across the desolate, hot, unsheltered desert, without food or water to refresh them, they took up their march.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

Before his swimming sight
Does not a figure bound,
And a soft voice, with wild delight,
Proclaim the lost is found?
No, hunter no!—ALFRED STREET.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the plain.—LOTUS-EATERS.

It was noon of the second day since Buckskin Joe and the sallow stranger of the other train left their respective companies in search of the missing girl.

'It's no use, Mister; we may as well put back in time to

save our own skins. We'll never set eyes on that gal ag'in. Vittals is scarce and water scarcer; we may as well put back to the train. If we start now we can overhaul 'em before morning—the way back is more direct than the one we've took, and the moon'll be up so we can travel a'most all night.

They had been trotting along at a languid pace, their horses panting with heat and thirst, for some time before Joe made this remark. He made it now in a tone which told how reluctant he was to come to such a conclusion.

The stranger, who had not spoken for two hours, reined up his animal with a jerk; his eyes flashed fire as they met those of the guide.

"So you abandon her to her fate, do you?"

"Wal, I reckon there's no use of you curlin' up your nose at me if I do," responded Joe, angered by the fierce sneer of his companion's face. "What man kin do to save that child I'm wil'in' to do, though she's no kith or kin of mine. But there's no use keepin' on this way—'twon't save her and 'twon't do no good. We've *got* to give up for the present—she's dead or out of our reach 'fore this. But this I say—if them pesky red-skins has had any thing to do with carrying her off, we'll find it out sooner or later. I'll track her, dead or alive, if it takes ten years—and I'll have my revenge on 'em—for I took a fancy to that little critter." He drew his sleeve across his eyes, and then, ashamed of the weakness, looked as if about to whip his companion, as a more natural way of giving vent to his emotions.

"I will not, I *can not* give her up!" said Mr. Carolyn. "I will perish here in the effort to find her. Friend, do not leave me yet. I will cheerfully give you a thousand dollars if we are successful."

"I'd do more for Miss 'Lizabeth than I would for a thousand dollars, stranger. Buckskin Joe'd never give up while thar' was as much hope left as thar' is white on a black cat. But gold won't water our horses nor bring game to our feet in this cussed desert. We're on the trail now, and our only chance for ourselves is to keep it, and catch up with our company. If it would do *her* any good, the Lord knows I'd starve to death in welcome."

A repressed groan was the only reply of the other, whose eyes roved restlessly over the broad and burning expanse. There was a look of wildness and misery in his face which caused Joe to mutter to himself:

"The sun on his head is onsettlin' his brain."

The next moment the flash of something against the light dazzled him; looking to see what it was, he perceived the stranger, as if oblivious of his presence, holding a ring in his hand and utterly absorbed in gazing upon it. He knew it in an instant—it

was Elizabeth Wright's! Indignation and astonishment struggled in the honest mind of the guide. His acquaintance with Mr. Carollyn, developed as it had been by the intimacy of the last two days, had increased his respect for the courage, endurance, the great learning and the real manliness of his companion, whom he both respected and admired.

The matter of the ring had been almost driven from his mind by greater anxieties. Now he recalled the young girl's suspicions, and his promise that he would restore the lost jewel to her if he should discover it, even upon the person of the haughty gentleman. Resolved to risk the consequences of giving offense, he at once inquired:

"Where did you get that, Mr. Carollyn?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because it belongs to the gal we're after. She felt mighty bad at losing it. I promised to help her find it. I s'pose it lost off her finger and you picked it up?" The half-suspicious, half-inquiring tone in which this last sentence was put brought a faint smile to the haggard countenance of his hearer.

"It shall be returned to her—be sure of that, friend—that is, if she be not lost forever! My God, I can not give up! After so many years—and now—is my punishment never to cease? Man! man!" he cried, catching and wringing Joe's hand, all the pride vanished from his manner, "she is mine, my child! my only child! I have found her only to lose her. Oh, say, is there not something yet to be tried? I can not go back!"

"Wal, that beats all," muttered Joe, looking curiously to see some token of insanity in his companion's eyes.

"I'm telling you the plain, simple truth; that girl is my own daughter; this ring is mine as well as hers—her mother's wedding-ring. Say that you will not give up, friend," he persisted.

"I s'pose there's water about five or ten miles easterly, and we mought possibly find some kind of game near it, to make a supper on. If it'll relieve your mind any, stranger, we'll camp thar' to-night, and let the train go on without us. It's risky, and it won't do no good—but it shan't be said that Buckskin Joe ever give up, while any body else held out—so thar'!"

Their hands met in a strong grip which sealed the promise; again their horses were started on, and for the next hour they rode along the sultry plain silently, with sharp, attentive glances, discovering nothing to stimulate their sinking hopes.

"What's that! what in thunder?" suddenly spoke Joe, stopping his horse, and pointing to a dark object lying in a little heap nearly a mile away on the yellow plain.

"It looks like an antelope," said Mr. Carollyn, looking in the direction indicated.

"It looks like a human critter," said Joe, and without further delay, the two struck off at full speed for the little dark spot which had attracted their curiosity. "It looks like two on 'em!" was his next remark.

"A man and a woman!" he added presently.

"White!" was his next observation.

"Nat Wolfe, I'll be dogged!"—a moment later.

"And 'Lizabeth Wright," he shouted, exultantly, bounding forward.

In ten seconds more he sprung from his horse, ran up to the hunter—who had risen to his feet and waved one arm while with the other he supported the slender form of a female—and shook his fist in his face.

"Thunder and blazes! Nat Wolfe, if you hain't went and gone and been the first in the field ag'in! You're a mean, impertinent, sneaking fellow—what business, I say, have you with this gal? Didn't you know I was after her? Couldn't you let her be? You might a' known I'd been all right, in the course of time. This is the second time you've stepped in between me and her—and, by hokey, ef you do it ag'in, I'll consider it a personal matter."

"You must be a little faster on your pegs, then, my boy," said Nat, a little faintly, but trying to laugh. "You've come in very good time now, though, and if you've got something for the girl to eat and drink I'll give you all the credit of saving her."

In the mean time, Dr. Carollyn, with the eye of a physician, had detected at one glance the state of the case; he, too, sprung from his horse, and snatching the maiden from Nat's arm, poured between her lips a spoonful of brandy from a flask in his belt. The liquid ran through her veins like pleasant fire; she opened her eyes, smiled, and made an effort to sit up unassisted. Hope and joy equally with the more material stimulus revived her from the state of almost insensibility in which she had been lying for some time.

"She's about beat out," muttered Joe, "that's sartain. If I hadn't a' come just as I did, she'd been a goner. Here, Miss 'Lizabeth, here's a biscuit—eat it, every crumb of it, for you're starved, I know."

She caught at the food eagerly but the firm hand of the stranger withdrew it.

"Cautiously, at first," he said, breaking off little bits, and feeding her as he would a baby.

"I'll be danged if anybody'll let me do any thing fer that gal," scolded Joe. "Everybody meddles."

"Do something for me, then," said Nat. "I shouldn't object to a bit of bread and meat, if you've got it to spare."

Joe, who was only discontented when he could not be useful

to somebody, turned his wallet inside out in his generous search for provisions.

"Be careful," again said the calm voice of the Doctor, "do not waste any thing. We have got to make our way to the train on that limited supply. Joe, you have water in your canteen? Mix a little of this brandy with it and give him."

The hunter ate and drank sparingly, for he was well aware of the necessity of prudence; it was a feast to him to see the light and color coming back into the maiden's face. Although he had fasted much longer than she, he was inured to just such hardships, and was much the least exhausted of the two. Their sufferings had been chiefly from thirst, increased by the heat and the necessity for constant exertion.

They had been disappointed in finding the stream which Nat had been certain was within marching distance on their route, the previous day. They had walked all day, and far into the night, in hopes of reaching it, and finding perhaps an antelope or even a stray prairie-dog upon which they might sup.

Of course the hunter was obliged to shorten his steps to those of his little friend; and she, tasking her energies to the utmost, would not say that she must pause for rest, until she finally sunk down in the darkness, unable to proceed further.

That was a strange night in the experience of both. The young girl, clinging to him like a child to its mother, was cherished as sacredly. She complained neither of hunger or thirst, nor of her fear of prowling savages and animals, but as the wild wind of midnight grew more chilly, she shrunk closer to him; he took her to his breast, wrapped about her his own leather jacket, and she slept away all memory of danger and fatigue. We can not protect and shelter any helpless thing without softening toward it, even if it be troublesome and stupid—how, then, could Nat Wolfe care for this most beautiful and innocent maiden, as circumstances obliged him to do, without feeling the growing of a golden chord binding their interests together in bands never more to be broken? The soft cheek upon his shoulder, the softer bosom close to his own, returned the sacrifice of his jacket, by kindling a warmth in his heart which bid defiance to the cold wind.

As soon as the deep darkness preceding the dawn began to lighten, he aroused his slumbering companion.

"You can walk better now than in the heat of the day," he said; "poor child, I wish I had food to offer you."

"I feel much rested now, sir; and perhaps we shall find something to kill before many miles."

She spoke cheerfully, and, for a while, felt so; but as the sun came slowly up, and rose higher and higher in the heavens—as the sand grew hot under her blistered feet, and the sky hot on her

aching head—as hour after hour rolled away and no stream met her feverish gaze—as her lips began to parch with thirst and her frame to faint with hunger—then she could no longer conceal from her companion how terribly exhausted she was. Several times he took her in his arms and carried her a long ways, for he did not dare to pause to give her the needed rest—every moment which kept them from the expected stream and possible succor took away from their faint hopes of relief.

Nat Wolfe's own powerful frame was severely tried; he had staggered more than once, for it will be remembered that he had but scanty fare for a day or two before his rescue of Elizabeth, and the torture of thirst was upon him too.

"Go on—oh, do go on and leave me here. I can not take another step, and you must not kill yourself by staying to see me die. If you were not hindered by me you could go so much faster," pleaded the young girl, sinking at last under the meridian heat.

"Leave you, Elizabeth?" said Nat, for the first time using her name in addressing her; and once more he swung her into his arms, though her light form seemed made of iron, so weak was he growing. "Look ahead! don't you see trees? don't you see the glimmer of water? I'm sure we're not a mile from the spot."

"Yes!" she cried, in a strange, excited voice, "I see trees and water—a lovely lake—oh, so beautiful! like those of my childhood, and apples on the trees! cool, delicious apples and peaches. Walk faster, Nat, to the cool, cool water—" her voice sunk to a whisper, her head drooped—she had fainted even while longing for the beautiful mirage which reached her strained and feverish vision.

Filled with anguish, almost cursing fate, Nat staggered on. He threw away his rifle—his precious rifle, next in rank to his lost Kit Carson in his affections—for he could no longer be burdened by it. On—on—feeling that water, at least, could not be far away—until, finally, he, too, was compelled to rest. He knew very well that the rest might be fatal to both—but nature refused to be longer overtaken. Sinking upon the ground, he gazed in despair upon the fair face drooping back over his arm, the long tresses of dark hair sweeping about it, the breath scarcely fluttering over the parched, parted lips. To think that he had not even a drop of water with which to stay that departing soul! He was almost mad with the bitterness of the truth. He chafed the limp hands, he fanned the pale brow.

"At least we will die together," he murmured, fixing his lips upon hers with the first, last kiss of love and despair, of life and death. As if it called back her fluttering senses, she opened her eyes and smiled upon him—a dreamy smile, yet a smile, he was sure of it, full of love such as filled his own heart.

How long he sat holding her thus, his eyes bent upon her, half closed and quiet, but full of passionate devotion, he knew not. The clatter of horses' hoofs roused them from their dying dream, and thus it was that Buckskin Joe had his full share in the rescue of the little girl, after all. It was the contents of his canteen and wallet which brought life back to the perishing.

As soon as the rescued were sufficiently revived, Dr. Carollyn took the girl before him on his horse, supporting her firmly in one arm. Joe gave up his animal to Nat, and trudged along on foot, with that long, loping step which takes these guides over the ground with such ease and rapidity. He was not wrong in his conjecture as to the vicinity of water; a few miles brought them to a stream which was one of those depended upon by emigrants for a supply. Here it was thought best to recruit the strength of all parties by tarrying in the shade of some sickly cottonwoods until the sun was down, and pursue their journey as far as possible during the cooler night. No sooner were the horses secured and the others comfortably seated, after bathing feet and hands in the refreshing water, than Joe crept away with his rifle down the stream in the hopes of meeting something eatable. In the course of half an hour they heard the crack of the rifle, followed in due course of time by the reappearance of the little old guide, tugging a young antelope after him.

"Thar' now, Miss 'Lizabeth, don't say I never did nothin' for you," he remarked, casting his treasure at her feet.

"You do nothing but kind deeds to me and every one, Joe," she said, with something of the accustomed arch smile sparkling about her eyes and mouth.

"A piece of broiled antelope will be the best thing possible for the young lady," said Dr. Carollyn, with almost a glow of admiration on his dark face, as he assisted at gathering stray branches and leaves under the trees, and kindled a fire, while Joe dressed the game.

"Young lady!" muttered Joe, to himself; "'young lady' be danged! If that ain't cool to his own daughter, after bein' in such a fidget as he was a spell ago. The circumstances is rather curious, anyhow; and if I don't see that ring back on Miss 'Lizabeth's finger I shall have to tell her what I know about it."

"Joe," said Dr. Carollyn, a little while later, as he came close to the guide to help him in cutting some steaks from the antelope, speaking in a low voice, "of course I can trust in your discretion for the present. It would be dangerous, in the exhausted state of my daughter, to speak to her on any exciting subject. She knows nothing whatever of the relationship between her and myself—I dare not reveal it yet. Wait until she is restored to those who seem now to have the best right to her, and she and they and yourself shall hear the story."

"I reckon you can manage your own business—I shan't presume to meddle," responded the guide, mollified immediately by this evidence of regard for his favorite's interest, and confidence in himself; "to be sure, any thin' startlin' would finish her up jes' now. It's dreadful lucky we didn't turn back when we was goin' to. I'm right glad you held out as you did. Nat Wolfe hasn't told us yet how it all come about."

"Wait till we have supped on fresh meat, and we shall hav all the particulars, no doubt."

In the mean time, the two most exhausted of the little party reclined beneath the cottonwoods, quiet and silent. It was delight enough to see the water glittering before them, to hear the parched leaves rustle, to inhale the delicious odor of the venison broiling over the coals—their frames were in that state of weakness and languor when soul and sense are both most easily stirred. It was such a joy to feel safe, to be cared for, to wait for the feast which kind hands were preparing. The hour to both was one of strange, new happiness, as of souls taking their first repose in Paradise. Although neither of them tried to analyze their own emotions, the consciousness of what they had thought and felt and read in each other's eyes during those perilous hours just past was secretly thrilling the heart of each. Nat's eyes dwelt almost constantly upon the young girl's face, who scarcely raised her own, so conscious was she of that ardent gaze—a slight red spot in either pale cheek telling the story of her own feelings.

While this little tableau was being silently enacted, the brow of Dr. Carolyn was growing dark as a thunder-cloud, while his eyes flashed covert lightning from beneath. He was troubled, discontented, angry. He had found a child, a daughter, whose want of accomplishments suited to the rank he should soon confer upon her was fully counterbalanced by her exceeding beauty, grace and natural refinement. He had already felt more pleasure than had filled his breast in seventeen years, in dreaming of how he should develop that fine mind and cultivate those unconscious charms. That she still retained all the innocence of childhood his keen observation had convinced him, the first hour of their meeting—that strange chance meeting, which had told him in that wild place and in that unexpected way that he had a child!—a truth he had often dreamed over, doubting and wondering. When he first went, in the camp of the emigrants, to do a kindness to women and children, he had been moved in a mysterious manner at the first sight of that young face—he had felt thrilled by an electric shock, before he perceived the ring. *That* was the key unlocking the marvel. He knew in an instant, more certainly than as if it had been sworn to, that he saw his child—the child of his Annie. He knew as certainly that Annie was dead—else, never would his daughter have been here under such circumstances.

He had no need to question any party now—indeed, he could not at first, the shock was so sudden. That night he had crept to the side of the slumbering girl—he had sat and watched that sweet face bathed in the lustrous moonlight, while great, hot tears rolled over his cheeks. Her face was not Annie's—it was very lovely, but it was not Annie's—so fair, so angelic, with golden ringlets and deep-blue eyes. No, this was *his own* likeness, softened by youth and sex, but his own. The dark, curling lashes, the raven hair, the clear brunette skin, the passionate mouth, the proud brows were the softer type of himself. This was his child, indeed, only that the pride of his own expression in hers was a calm melancholy, telling, ah, how piteously, of the heart-broken musings of the desolate mother who bore her.

With tears such as men seldom have such occasion to weep, he had kept watch, in the repose of midnight, by his daughter's slumber; then, softly slipping the ring from her hand, he had stolen back to his own camp-wagon, to waste the rest of the night in the recollections of bliss and agony which the sight of that wedding-ring had brought back almost as vividly as if the events of those long-vanished years had happened yesterday.

It was not surprising that the next day should find him too much shaken in spirit to feel like unraveling the thread of mystery connected with his wife and child. He would linger by her side another day, observe her, and the people who had her in charge, and, as soon as he was calm enough to hear what there might be for them to tell, he would make himself known to them.

The devastation of the tornado the following night had interrupted his plans and plunged him into new distress. But, through all his fears for the fate of Elizabeth, sweet hopes had whispered to him that he should find her, that he should take her with him to the home which nature had fitted her to adorn, and he had exulted in the thought that she was still but a child—"in maiden meditation, fancy free"—whom he could guide, develop, sway. She was pure and beautiful—this was enough for him.

This was the cause of the thunder-cloud now gathering over the heaven of his anticipations. In these two days that his child had been snatched from him, had come a change. He saw the blush in her cheek, the new luster in her drooping eyes. He saw the man who had found and cherished her would be loth ever to resign the treasure he had, as it were, secured a right to.

Nat Wolfe little suspected the searching jealousy that was reading his every thought and action. He did, indeed, although he had scarcely *thought* at all about it, feel as if Elizabeth was his own—as if he never more could leave this child to the

dangers of the rude life she was compelled to live—as if he must take her in his strong arms, shield her against his strong breast, and keep, hereafter, the winds of heaven from blowing upon her too roughly.

But if he *had* been conscious that the haughty gentleman who had taken so deep an interest in her rescue, had claims stronger than his, and would bitterly *deny* his right to advance his own, it would not have changed his resolves.

Nat Wolfe was not a man to yield the mastery to any one. His will was not to be ruled. His pride was as stubborn in its way as Dr. Carolyn's. He despised the effeminacy of city civilization more thoroughly than any one despised the rudeness of his handsome, courageous manhood.

If he could win the shy maiden to love the tangles of unshorn hair, the tried strength of his protecting arm, the sincere passion of his untutored heart, she should be his by the right of affinity.

The lion of his nature lay, however, for the present, unaroused. He only dreamed of the young form that he had held through the chill watches of the preceding night, and of the soft eyes that had answered his own with mute promises of deathless love in moments they had thought their last of earth—of the long, wild kiss with which he had sought to hold the sinking soul of the girl on his breast. And now they were safe and well again, almost strong, drinking delicious draughts of life, free to love, to live, to be happy!

The welcome supper was prepared. Dr. Carolyn himself attended to the quantity and quality of Elizabeth's share of the feast. Every morsel was ambrosial. The whole party were renovated by the needed refreshment. Nat told the story of his rescue of the kidnapped girl, his voice quivering slightly over the mention of Kit Carson's death.

The faithful horses who had borne Joe and the Doctor on their long, sultry ride, received their share of attention, being carefully watered, and fed on the short, coarse grass along the bank of the stream. Then, as the sunset hour approached, with wallets well filled with cooked antelope, and canteens overflowing with water, the quartette set out in good spirits, along the trail, hoping by traveling nearly all night, and making good speed next day, to overtake their company. To Buckskin Joe it was reserved to walk, he generously resigning his animal to Nat, while Elizabeth, as before, rode with Dr. Carolyn.

Without further accidents, and with only such events as were common to the journey, the party reached the encamped emigrants at the time they expected. A great shout of joy rung over the plain as the lost ones were welcomed back to the anxious company.

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVELATION.

I shrink from the embittered close
 Of my own melancholy tale ;
 'Tis long since I have waked my woes—
 And nerve and voice together fail.—WILLIS.

How may this little tablet feign
 The features of a face,
 Which o'erinforms with loveliness,
 Its proper share of space.—PINCKNEY.

"It was right kind of you, stranger, to put yourself out so much to help find our Lizzie," remarked Mrs. Wright, after the first excitement of the morning was over.

Dr. Carolyn had just returned from a visit to the wagon, where lay the man with the broken leg, who was doing as well as possible. The camping-ground where they had been so long detained was, fortunately, pretty well supplied with grass and water, so that the cattle were rather enjoying their holiday. The men had been kept busy repairing the damages done by the tornado, and now were in unusually good spirits, both on account of the safe return of the lost ones, as also in the prospect that another day's successful march would bring them into the belt of comparatively fertile prairie at the foot of the mountains. The dreaded part of the journey was over; to-morrow there would be wood and grass and water in plenty—in three days at furthest they would be at the scene of their anticipation—their El Dorado; to realize something of their feverish dreams or to be overwhelmed with bitter disappointment—which?—there was plenty reason to fear the latter; but the human heart is more elastic than any other earthly substance—it will hope, it *must* hope—it does hope always; and these men talked as if seas of gold were rolling at their feet.

"We shall never forget it, sir, so long as we live," added Mr. Wright, looking affectionately over at the maiden, who was sitting on a buffalo-skin under a canopy made of a wagon-cover stretched upon some poles.

She looked wearied out with exposure and excitement, but her smile was one of the most brilliant content; and she had not refused little Mary a place in her lap, fatigued as she was. The child had missed her so much as to fairly pine, and was now close in the shelter of her arms, sleeping, and laughing in her sleep. The two boys hung about, looking at their cousin as at some new and wonderful creature, their pleasure being testified by bashful smiles and giggles.

"Perhaps I have been more selfish in the matter than any of

you dream," replied the gentleman, with a peculiar look at the young girl. "Elizabeth, you are not strong enough to hold that little one; let me give it to its mother. And now, I'm going to sit here, and tell you something strange."

He sat down on the robe beside her, and lifted one of her small, brown hands in his; there was something in his manner which arrested the attention of all. Mrs. Wright leaned forward, her husband took his tobacco-pipe from his mouth, leaning his elbows on his knees; Buckskin Joe, who was on the alert for this little episode, strolled alongside, standing, with a great quid in one cheek, and whittling away with his hunting-knife at a green switch; while Golden Arrow, who was also lounging on the grass, and near enough to hear every uttered word, straightened himself up, with eyes that began to flash as he saw the way in which Elizabeth's hand was taken in possession of. His first thought was that this proud, reserved gentleman was about to make a declaration of love to the young girl, and the maddening jealousy which fired his veins taught him the full strength of the feeling she had awakened. The words which followed, however, gave a new direction to his fears.

"What do you say, friends—do you see any resemblance between this maiden and myself?" and the speaker drew the soft, oval face up beside his older and sallow countenance.

"La me! if they don't look enough alike to be father and child! don't they, Tim?" exclaimed Mrs. Wright.

"They sartainly do look alike, wife."

"Since we look so much like parent and daughter, and since this maiden has neither father nor mother, why not give her up to me, and let me have her for my child? This life you are bringing her up to is too hard and rough for her."

"So 'tis—so 'tis, stranger!" said Timothy, "but it's the best we can do for her—and we couldn't spare Lizzie. No! no!"

"You have others to provide for—I have no one. I am rich; I could give her all she wishes and ought to have."

"Wal, in the first place, stranger, if you're in earnest, you'd have to give purty satisfactory proofs of who and what you was, before you get our Lizzie. As for the rest, we love her too much to want to be selfish—and she can speak for herself."

"What do you say, Elizabeth? Will you be my daughter?"

She made no reply; she was looking at him with a startled, wistful gaze—something was stirring in her blood and brain which moved her mysteriously—her subtle sense was half conscious of the affinity between this stranger and herself.

"You never knew your father, Elizabeth?"

"Never."

"Or your mother?"—how his voice trembled.

"She has been dead many years—since I was three years old—but I remember her," and the tears rushed into voice and eyes.

The cautious prudence with which Dr. Carolyn meant to approach the avowal was swept away by a sudden torrent of emotion—tears blinded him, his lips quivered, he endeavored in vain to speak, to compose himself—until finally he caught the surprised girl to his breast, held her closely, exclaiming:

"Oh, my lost Annie! you are her child, yes, you are her child and mine. You are indeed my own flesh and blood—I am your father, my darling!"

"Wal, if that don't beat all," was Mrs. Wright's comment amid the silence of the rest of the group. "I always told you, husband, this very thing would turn up some time."

"How do I know he's speakin' truth?" growled Timothy.

"Did you know Elizabeth's mother?" asked Mr. Carolyn.

"I reckon we did, when she lived with us full four years—she was with us before this child was born, and stayed with us till she went to a better place—to the heaven where she belonged," and the woman put her apron up to her eyes.

"I will show you the likeness of my wife," said Dr. Carolyn, putting Elizabeth gently aside, and drawing a miniature case from an inner vest-pocket over his heart.

Wright and his wife sprung forward to look at it.

"It's her!" they both cried, lingering as if they could not look enough—another was also hanging tranced above it, the maiden gazing at the picture of her mother, whose girlish face was scarcely older than her own—gazing, breathless and tearless, upon the delicate, lovely vision whose blue eyes looked out of ripples of golden hair like an angel's out of a cloud.

"It is my mother," she said, "I have never forgotten her."

"And I am your father—oh, say that your heart no longer denies me the title."

The young girl looked into his face, full of the most yearning love and anguish; her own soul was deeply stirred. The dreams with which her melancholy childhood had been haunted, had ever pictured to her something different from the commonplace, narrow, poverty-enthralled life about her. Her vague memories of a mother, beautiful and refined, together with long musings over the few jewels and fine articles of clothing she had left, had helped her to build up a world as different from the coarse scenes of her daily experience as Paradise from common earth. It was in this world of dreams she moved when those dark eyes floated with those far-away, lustrous looks which made those about her feel that she was different from them, and leave her undisturbed to her reveries. Kind and gentle as she had ever been to her friends, winning their warmest love, she was conscious of affections and aspirations which their companionship never called forth.

"Speak—let me hear you call me father!"

The deep, musical tones, whose singular power seldom failed to move those whom he addressed with earnestness, and now

quivering with untold pathos, pierced to her heart; her bosom fluttered like a frightened bird's—her eyes turned to each one of the group, those true, affectionate friends of hers, and lastly, lingered an instant on those of Nat Wolfe, who had risen and was standing motionless, regarding her with a keen look—then her hand slipped into Dr. Carolyn's, she kissed his cheek and called him—

“Father.”

When she thought of him again, Nat had disappeared; he had turned abruptly from the scene, and was walking off the pain and anger which tormented him, out of sight of the camp. He was more wordly-wise than Elizabeth; when he saw her yield to the claim of this courtly father, he knew that all her old associations were to be shaken off like a worn-out garment. For hours he strode back and forth along the outskirts of the camp, like a sentinel doing duty most conscientiously, his mind in such a tumult as had not shaken it for years.

“It is my fate,” he muttered. “The soft blessings of a woman's love are never to warm this rough experience of mine. I was mad—a fool, to dream that it could be! I will not suffer the whole accursed thing over again,” he continued. “It is enough to have had life blighted once, as mine was blighted. Why have I allowed this flower to spring again on the withered stalk? I should have known some frost would blacken it. The Fates should have made me more heartless or her less pure and lovely. What man could have cherished that innocent girl through days and nights, seeing her so confiding, so entirely a child in heart yet a woman in beauty, and not have felt the hard suspicion and dislike within him melt away? I wish I had never met her? I wish that confounded dark-skinned Doctor had chanced in some other company. I'm a fool to believe in woman! Two days ago she told me with her dying eyes, that she loved me—to-morrow she will tell me that she has changed her mind. The prospect of a little worldly splendor and flattery will turn any woman's head—or heart!”

Poor Nat! it was no wonder he spoke bitterly—that he stamped and stalked about in a manner quite different from his usual careless dignity. Far back in the past of his early manhood, when his fresh, boyish soul trusted all, and adored every woman as something to be revered and idolized, he had loved a girl of his own age. He was not a hunter of bison and Indians in those days—he was a handsome, proud, well-educated youth, the son of an esteemed clergyman, who, though poor, as is the wont of village ministers, managed to send his oldest son to college, and was glad, as even a minister has a right to be, to see him so bright, so graceful, so brilliant in intellect—the peer of any of the young men with whom he associated.

The Rev. Mr. Wolfe had never been so unwise as to plan that

his son should follow his own profession; for that Nathaniel was never made for the quiet, severely-disciplined life of his father was self-evident. Reckless, gay, full of wit and courage, it was yet impossible for the surliest deacon in his father's church to find fault with any action of his life. His morals were pure, his impulses good and generous—the deficiency in his character was that those impulses were not under the control of his judgment, and that his feelings were allowed too rash a rule.

He was just the young man to make the most devoted and winning lover. The maidens were all pleased with his attentions; and, of course, before he was fairly out of college, he was desperately enamored of the belle and beauty of the village, the 'Judge's' daughter. She liked him, too; she could not resist his handsome face and delicious devotion; she allowed herself to be engaged to him—and then, of course, he had to think of marriage, and the future. He had nothing, and she would be quite an heiress; he was too proud to live off her family, who wouldn't have permitted it, if he had been willing; he decided to study law, an offer having been made him by a friend of his father's in the city of New York—bade his darling betrothed a two years' passionate farewell, and set out, full of hope and ambition, to begin the struggle for the anticipated reward. Before his probation was much more than half over, he received news of the marriage of his affianced, to a wealthy widower, a squire of a neighboring town, who had seen and admired her beauty.

His friends thought that the rudeness of the shock would produce a reaction which would enable him to despise and forget her, while the disappointment would strengthen his character and subdue his too-romantic ideal. But they did not know how peculiarly the blow would fall upon his proud, dreamy, sensitive feelings. Having been offered the transaction of some rather unpleasant but profitable business in the far West, by the lawyer in whose office he was, and who did not wish to attend to the matter himself, he accepted the offer, with the secret resolution to never return to the mockery and falsehood of civilized society.

Upon reaching the wild settlements for which he was destined, the rude freedom of life in these places was a balm to his wounded and outraged spirit. Naturally fond of adventure, and brave as reckless, his present contempt for life added to his courage. He made friends with the sturdy trappers and guides; he learned their modes of living, joined eagerly in their pursuits, and soon outdid them in their own peculiar accomplishments. An incident which occurred quite early in his western experience, where a whole family of helpless women and children were savagely murdered by a prowling band of Indians, turned his dislike upon them. These barbarous bands were then the terror

of the white settlers—the only too well-founded dread of them lying like a dark and stealthy shadow at every isolated cabin-door, making children shriek in their sleep, and the faces of mothers to grow pale as they rocked the rude cradles wherein their innocent infants slumbered.

Those who have had an opportunity of observing how speedily men change when going to some new country where the firm restraints of law and public opinion are taken away—a change which affects morals and actions, manners and dispositions as quickly as it does their dress and conversation—will not be surprised that ten years of border-life had changed the ardent youth into the 'Nat Wolfe' of hunter fame, whose name was the admiration of his associates and the terror of all cowardly savages.

Yet, beneath all the roughness of his hunter's frock and neglected locks, he was always the superior man in every company. There was a reserve and dignity about him which added to the respect paid to his remarkable skill and courage; his deeds were always honest and manly, his language free from real coarseness, his person neat, with a little touch of elegance even about his wild costume. While he was social and friendly on all the topics of their common life and adventure, he never betrayed his past history or his private feelings to any one. The grace of his manners, the beauty of his countenance, the superiority of his intellect, gave him great influence with men who, sincerely as they admired these traits in him, would yet have despised him had he not proved himself fully their equal in coolness, daring, and the expert wisdom required by his pursuits. Thus Nat Wolfe had become the pride and model of the hunters and guides of a vast region of prairie and forest; while the Indians, as we have said, gave him the name of "Golden Arrow," both on account of the brightness of his hair, and the preternatural swiftness and sureness they believed his darts, spears, knives and rifles to possess.

Curiously enough, right in the pathway of this hunter-skeptic, this man who had fled from the refinements of life because he believed them to gild only deceit and selfishness, the Fates had thrown this young girl, Elizabeth, a being so innocent of all worldly guile, so ignorant of life, so untempted, artless and pure, yet so lovely in spirit and form as to be fit for any sphere. They had thrown her in his pathway, left her in his protection as if purposely, that he might be made to know what truth and beauty there still could be in some women's characters; they had shaken the fixed resolves of years, melted away his stoicism like ice in tropic sunlight—until he was warmed, thrilled, entranced—made over again in all the delicious trust and poetry of his boyhood—ready to give this maiden a love as sweet and hopeful as the first enthusiastic dream—Fate, or circumstance, had done this—what for? To drive him back again into a

desolation more dreary than before! Ere he could fashion his hopes into words, ere he could ask the maiden to share with him the life of mingled luxury and wildness which he had painted as best fitted for both their natures, this specious tempter must come, in the shape of a haughty and wealthy father, to snatch away his Eve and feed her on the apples of knowledge. It was no wonder his thoughts were bitter as he tramped to and fro beneath the large, bright stars of the prairie-sky, which here seemed to come almost close enough to earth to be reached by his weary longing.

In the mean time, Dr. Carollyn was deeply engaged with the Wrights, listening, the most of the time with his face bowed and hidden in his hands, to the particulars of his wife's residence with this family. They were no relatives of hers; although they had taught Elizabeth to regard them as such, for the sake of making the orphan feel at home, as if she had a claim on them.

"They were a new-married couple themselves," Mrs. Wright said, and "had just sot up for themselves in a little house her father had built for them on a part of his own farm, in O— county, York State. They hadn't been to housekeeping but a few days when the lady came along, and wanted to board with them for the summer. She had no family then, nothin' much to do, and was right glad to take such a nice boarder, who paid them enough and well for all they did for her. Their place was small, but it was pleasant—looked out over an orchard and wheat-fields, off to Lake Ontary, lying as blue as the sky ag'in it. The lady had a neat chamber to herself, where she could look at the lake night and day, if she wanted to, which she mostly did. They knew of course there was something queer about her comin' there alone; she give her name as Mrs. St. John—but they didn't like to ask her questions; and they couldn't have been made to believe any thing bad about her. Some of the neighbors did talk and make remarks; but she and Tim set more store by the lady than they did by their own relatives; nobody that knew her, but would see, to oncet, she was a perfect angel—(ah, jealous man, how bitterly that unmeant lart stung thee!)—she was always so sad and quiet, but so gentle, and didn't make any fuss about any thing. When it became plain she was going to be a mother before long, she took me to her room oncet, when Tim was gone, and showed me her marriage-certificate, only she covered up her husband's name; and she told me there had been a difficulty; but if she should die and her baby should live, she would leave a letter for me to open, so I could give the child to its father, that he should do by it as he ought.

"Wal, she was very sick, but she didn't die; she got 'round ag'in, but was never well—she took the consumption—sort of faded away like. She stayed with us all the time. We hadn't

no children of our own yet, and we set our hearts on our little girl—the prettiest, sweetest, cunningest little thing that ever was! She saw how we loved little Lizzie, and she finally told me, a few weeks 'fore she died, that we might keep the child, and do by it as our own—that she believed the poor little creature would be heart-broken to be sent off to cold and cruel strangers—'we loved her,' she said, and we cried and said we did, and would do far more for that baby than as if it was our own. So she put away the ring, and what little things she had, and a couple o' hundred dollars in gold, in a box to be kept till the child was growed up, with a letter to her, to be read when she was eighteen; she saved out money to buy herself a shroud and coffin; and so she went at last, as quiet as a lamb."

"And left no word for me at the very last," cried her listener.

"Maybe she would have said somethin' at the last, but she went before anybody knew it. She was about her room the day before she died; that night we heard her speak, and got right up and went into her chamber, but she was dead when we reached her. Since then we've kept our promise as well as we could, haven't we, Lizzie?—which is poor enough at the best, for Timothy has been unlucky, and we've seen hard times, and so poor Lizzie has had rough times."

"Yes, we've had bad luck," said Mr. Wright, "we mostly have had all kind of misfortunes; but the Lord has blessed that little girl to us, for all."

That firmness of will, that selfishness of purpose, which is apt to accompany the intense pride and jealousy of a disposition like Dr. Carolyn's, was already working out the problem in his mind of how he was to separate his child from these associations in which she had grown up. This very evening, while moved to agony and remorse keen as that he felt the first day of his desolation, and amid the very gratitude the recital of these kind-hearted people awakened, he was conscious of regret that the ties between them and his should be so strong, and of a resolve that they must be severed. Yet he was far too generous and noble to wish to wrong the feelings of any; he did not intend to hint at any abrupt or long-continued separation; he wished to reward, as far as money could, the care and expense his child had been to these adopted relatives, to lighten the burden of their poverty, while into the heart of his daughter he thought to win his way gradually, and when he once had her to himself, he feared not but that the awakening of dormant tastes, the bewitching influences of ease and refinement, would complete the work of alienation. The proud love of his passionate nature, so long doomed to suspense and solitude, fixed now upon his child, as it had once fixed on the orphan Annie St. John, with the wish to absorb and possess its object utterly. Could he then brook a rival at the very onset?—that rival a lover, and a man of the stamp of Nat Wolfe? He had other

dreams for this beautiful girl—"sole daughter of his house and heart"—and the hunter, walking his impatient beat a mile away, knew it as well as himself—knew it better, for Dr. Carolyn had not yet realized the actualities of the case. If he took Elizabeth away with him to his eastern home, that, of course, would be the end of any incipient fancy which might be growing in her mind for her dashing preserver.

Every glance of Dr. Carolyn's at the ungainly calico frock which his daughter wore, every illiterate expression of her friends, grated upon his feelings. It was to him the most powerful evidence of the deadly nature of the blow he had struck into the heart of his sensitive, confiding wife, that she had sternly resolved to leave her little one with such people, rather than send her to *him*—"cruel and cold strangers," she had said, but she had meant him, or, at least when she felt that her own protection could no longer be exercised over their babe, she would have consigned it to him. He dared not linger upon the history of that past time—but now, if his wife could look from the heaven where she was sheltered from the cruelties of earth, she should see that the tenderness in which he should wrap their child from every breath of any chilling care or sorrow, would satisfy her yet.

As for Elizabeth, she was absorbed in conjecturing what the difficulty could have been which alienated such a mother from such a father in the very honeymoon of their wedded youth—of this she was thinking far more than of the change in her own prospects.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRE IN THE FOREST.

What is that which I should turn to, lighting upon days like these?
Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys.

LOCKSLEY HALL.

Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire!

THE BELLS.

NAT WOLFE and Buckskin Joe were traversing a wild pine forest on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. As they came out on a projecting ledge of rock from which they had a view of the mountain and plain beneath them, they turned to look back over the ground they had passed. Through the clear, bracing September air they distinctly saw where the little cluster of cabins was gathered about Pike's Peak, twenty miles away, by the smoke of the chimneys hovering over the settlement.

"We're purty nigh onto the spot now, if I recollect right," said Joe; "it's over a year sence I was here. Let's eat our grub—here's a basin of water in this rock a purpose for us to drink out of; after we've rested a spell we'll push on and find the exact locality. Cur'us, isn't it?—I didn't dream, when I traveled over this mountain the last time, that so many thousand fools would have sot foot on it in less'n a year. We made up our minds, then, me and Jim did, thar' was gold in this region—and I ain't sartain but we're responsible for givin' the fever to a good many," added the little old fellow, with a quiet chuckle. "It's a mighty catchin' disease—took more easily than the small-pox. The wust of it is, I'm afraid it'll prove fatal to a good many of them poor, white-livered chaps as have come expecting to crowd their pockets with rocks as big as goose-eggs, all ready picked up. I reckon Wright's one of the wust-up of any. He ain't naterally got any pluck, and he's out o' money and vittals, and instid of workin' for hisself and makin' thirty or forty dollars a day, he's had to hire out for a dollar a day and keepin'." I'm sorry for his wife, poor critter. But she's got more sperit than he has, and 'll make more money. She's takin' in washin' and cookin' for the men, and airns a good lot, I'll be bound. I shouldn't wonder if *she* got along and laid up money—which he'll be sure to borrow and have 'the luck' to lose. Have some o' this dried buffalo, Wolfe?—it's better'n your cold bacon.

"I don't wonder that saller-faced Doctor is anxious to get Miss 'Lizabeth away from such a hole as Pike's Peak," continued Joe, who grew talkative over his dried meat and whisky and water, giving a keen side-look at his companion as he spoke. "'Tain't no place for the likes of her—eh, Nat, what do you think? They say he'll leave with the first company that starts back, and take her along. I've a mind to hire out as guide, and see 'em safely back as far as Nebraska City."

"I wish you would," was the hunter's brief reply.

"Why don't *you* undertake the job, Wolfe?"

"I'm afraid my company wouldn't be agreeable," with a bitter laugh.

"Sho! it's the first time I ever knowed of *you* playin' the sneak, Nat Wolfe."

"What do you mean?" rather fiercely.

"You needn't turn on me like a trod nettle, Nat. I wouldn't like to make you mad—cos we're alone out here in the woods, and you're the biggest, and nobody'd ever know what had become of Buckskin Joe if you should chaw me up. But say, now, r'ally, I'll bet a thousand dollars, to be paid the day after we *find our lead*, that you hain't never asked that young lady whether she liked your comp'ny or not. Come, now, own up the corn."

"I'm not so humble as to put myself in the way of being walked over," was the haughty reply.

"Oh—oh, jest as I 'spected. I ain't a ladies' man—that is, not lately," said the little guide, running his fingers through his short hair as if moved by ancient reminiscences, "but I allers thought it didn't disgrace a feller if a purty woman did put her foot on his neck. How in thunder do you expect to know for sartin whether she likes you or not, if you're too mean to ask her. P'raps you want *her* to do the courtin'! Mighty generous you be, ain't you. All I can say is, if you let her go off without findin' out precisely her sentiments, you deserve to lose her—and ought to be thrashed besides for breaking her purty heart, Nat Wolfe!"

"Breaking her heart!" echoed Nat, in a softer voice, his eyes bent wistfully upon the blue smoke wreathing the distant settlement. "There's no danger of that—her heart's already mended, and stuffed full of silk dresses and diamonds, young men and flattery, elegant houses and rich friends."

"A woman wouldn't be a woman, if she didn't have a hankerin' after silk and satin and other fixin's—specially if she's young and handsome. I don't see any thing to prevent your supplyin' her with a fair share of sech—particularly if we're lucky in findin' what we're after on this tramp. As for that pesky father of hers, he'd no business poking along here jest at this time—though he's a perfect gentleman, and we hain't no reason to hate him as I knows on. 'Lizabeth's known you as long as she has *him*—and unless Buckskin Joe misses his guess more'n usual, she thinks a good deal more of the youngest one of the two. I should like to know if you think it's fair not to give her a chance to speak for herself?"

Nat smiled, rather sadly however, at the indignant, remonstrating tone of the guide; he felt cheered by his words, though, and brightened visibly, as he put away the remainder of his dinner in his wallet, and sprung to his feet, saying:

"Come on, then, my friend. Let's try for the gold, first, seeing we've come this far in search of it."

For a while they strode along in silence. The bracing air was fragrant with resinous odors, the dead tassels of the pines made a soft carpet under their feet; with rifles ready loaded to repel any wild animal who might see fit to resent their intrusion into his solitudes, eager, athletic, accustomed to the forest, they pressed onward with as little hesitation as if following some well-known highway.

It was a wild and glittering hope which danced before these sober men, leading them into the depths of mountain solitudes, hitherto trodden by white men seldom or never. Gold, the all-fascinating siren, allured them. Their hearts bounded, their pulses beat to the music of that whisper; the winds breathed it through the tall pines murmuring above them; the sunlight

sparkled only to remind them of its glitter. Fond master-passion of the universal heart! the love of gold, dearer even than the love of woman, for it holds the key to that love, and to every other earthly delight.

The little, quaint, withered guide was enough of a philosopher to pause all of a sudden in their journey, and say, with that peculiar quirk of the mouth:

"What in creation am I chasing off here after a gold mine for? S'posin' I should stumble on a few hundred thousands or millions, what on airth would I do with my share? When I've plenty of tobacco in my box, meat in my wallet and powder in my flask, I'm happy. I couldn't live without trampin' and huntin'. Yit here I am as crazy as the rest of 'em. Fact is, we're all a set of fools.

"Tell you what I will do," he continued, a little later, having evidently been dwelling on the subject: "if we strike a rich lead I'll give my share to Miss 'Lizabeth. She'd know how to make it fly, I reckon! As for me, I've neither wife nor child, and all I want is enough to keep me in tobacco."

Buckskin Joe had no need of riches; but when, an hour later, they emerged from the woods into a wild and rock ravine, down the center of which a little stream came dashing and roaring, leaping from rock to rock, broken into foam one moment, and mended with silver bands the next—when they emerged into this secluded place, over which great masses of mountain hung threateningly, dark with frowning pines, rough with water-washed rocks, he threw up his cap, and shouted aloud:

"Here's the spot, Wolfe! Unless I'm more mistaken than ever I war' in my life, thar's gold enough in this ravine to pave the ground a mile square for Miss 'Lizabeth to walk over. I'll show you my reasons in less'n half an hour."

The hot blood rushed into the hunter's cheeks; a bright light danced in his eye; his breath came more quick with the excitement of the hour. Was he about to lay his hand on untold treasures? He believed so.

The circumstances which had brought the two adventurers to this remote and unsuspected locality were these: Upon the previous year, Buckskin Joe, crossing the mountains with a brother trapper, all alone, with no other object but game, furs and "the fun of the thing," happened upon this wild, romantic and picturesque spot. Resolved to follow the ravine up the mountain side, they commenced the difficult work of making their way from rock to rock, hight to hight, charmed with the noisy play of the stream. Coming into a little dell where the water was gathered into a basin worn in the rock, from which it overflowed and tumbled down a moss-grown steep, Joe stooped to drink, when his eyes caught the glitter of a large pebble lying in the bottom of the basin. He plunged in his arm and brought up a lump of pure, soft gold, nearly uncontaminated

with other substances, and weighing nearly a pound. They lingered around the spot several days, finding half a dozen smaller specimens; then, having no way to bring off much treasure, and Joe's companion here injuring himself by an accident with his rifle, they were obliged to leave the mountains. They took their gold with them, and their story spread like wild-fire; but they betrayed to no one the exact locality of their discovery.

Another company made some discoveries in the same region that autumn. The news traveled through the winter and spring, and the summer saw people from all parts of the United States on their way to the new El Dorado.

So tardy and indifferent had Buckskin Joe been about profiting further by his good luck, that this was the first trip to the mountains since the time of his fortunate visit; the companion of his former trip was dead; he was sole possessor of the knowledge of a "lead" which, he was convinced, after a few days' observation of the "diggins" about Pike's Peak, was richer than any of them. He had come to the mature resolve to take Nat Wolfe into confidence and partnership—especially since he had observed the threatening clouds lowering about the two young people since the advent of the father into the interests of the group.

The result of a talk he had held with the moody hunter, a fortnight after the arrival of the company at their destination, was this private expedition, upon which the two set off, unsuspected by others.

With his present increased knowledge of mining, Joe "calculated" to pick up enough stray nuggets in the quiet basins and gullies of the stream to make the two men rich beyond their wishes, before it would be necessary to take any trouble of machinery. He was sure that the accumulated washings of centuries were lying ready to their hands.

With eager, watchful eyes and glowing veins the gold hunters pushed forward up the difficult ravine. The stream was now dwindled to about its slenderest proportions; it was an excellent season in which to attempt their plans; but the brief September afternoon began to darken before they had laid their hands upon any tangible evidence to give substance to their brilliant dreams. The sun, sinking early behind the mountains, threw their deep shadows over the way, often slippery and uncertain.

"Wal, we're here, and all ready for work in the mornin' bright and 'arly," said Buckskin Joe, as the night drew closer. "Our best way is to climb back into the woods ag'in; we can have a comfortable bed of boughs and pine-tossels, and begin to-morrer. Thar's no hurry—nobody's goin' to carry our fortunes off in the night. So let's make ourselves cosy. By this time to-morrer we'll be independent."

Clinging to roots of trees, washed bare by spring freshets, and to ledges of dark and chilly rock, they swung themselves up out of the cool ravine into the pleasant forest.

"We won't kindle a fire here in the midst of this pitchy stuff," remarked Joe; "the woods is jest like a match, ready to go off at the least rub, at this season of the year. Otherwise we might kill a brace of birds and brile them for supper. As it is, we'll make out on a cold smack."

By the time the repast was taken, evening had shut them in. The guide, healthily fatigued after their long tramp, with a look to his knife and rifle in case of a stray bear, composed himself soon upon his primeval couch, and was breathing the deep and regular breath of a good sleeper long before Nat could close his excited eyes. Dreams of the expected successes of this search, mingled with softer dreams of the fair girl from whom he seemed so far separated—as if she never had been near his heart, and never could be—thronged upon his brain, as he looked up at the great silver stars peering here and there through rifts of the pine branches far overhead.

The wind, according to its nightly habit, began to rise, and to rush roaring down the mountain side, kissing the dark boughs of the pines till they wailed in unison. It was a solemn, sweet and mighty music, pleasant to the soul and sense of the hunter as he lay there dreaming of the woman he loved. But as the hours crept on to midnight, he, too, slept.

Buckskin Joe, as he stirred uneasily in his sleep, had a strange, disagreeable dream. He thought the water in the ravine began to rise with an awful roar—to rise until it overflowed gully and wood—till his ears were stunned by its tumult—till it reached and overflowed him where he lay—he was drowning! and in the spasmodic efforts he made to buffet the horrible stream, he finally awakened. Yes, he was awake; but where he was, or what was the matter, he could not recall. He felt as if a thousand pounds lay upon his chest, pressing him in the earth—he heard a dull, curious, continuous roar, like the incessant discharge of cannon, through which pierced sharp reports, as of volleys of musketry; there was a lurid glare around him that was not the light of moon or sun—for an instant the rough hunter thought of hell! A flake of burning pine-cone falling upon his face revealed the truth. Great God, the forest was on fire!

As the appalling conviction rushed upon him, he raised upon his elbows and looked about. A sea of fire spread around him in every direction—they were already ringed in that awful circle. High overhead flew great sheets and banners of flame, snatched up by the wind and flung from tree-top to tree-top, while a fiery shower fell constantly, drifting down through the

lower foilage, which here was not fully kindled. Dense masses of hot and suffocating smoke now shut him in, and were again lifted for a moment by the howling wind. His first thought was of his companion.

He shouted, he felt about him, but obtained no response. Nat had gone to sleep about five yards from him, to the left. He rolled himself over and over until he reached what ought to be the spot, and here he groped about in the blinding smoke, calling sharply upon his friend, who, he was afraid, might be already overpowered. While he was making these efforts he choked, his brain reeled—he felt consciousness slipping from him as the dense vapor hung thicker and hotter about him. But before he entirely lost himself in that deadly struggle, a fierce gush of wind came rushing under the ocean of flame which roared far above. It caught up and whirled away the smoke; he breathed comparatively free again; and in that instant of salvation an instinct whispered to him of the cool ravine, of the delicious waters only such a little distance away. Better to fling himself down and be dashed to pieces on the rocks than to die by this torturing element which threatened him.

He crept along the ground with his face close to the earth. Once or twice the smoke grappled with him—as often a blessed breath of air came creeping after. Suddenly a cold draft struck him on the brow: he knew that it came up from the ravine. Gasping, exhausted, he made yet another effort, reached the edge of the rock, dragged himself over, hanging by his hands, and dropped, in the darkness, knowing nothing of the distance beneath him, nor what cruel reception he might meet from objects below.

For a short time after the fall he lay stunned by the shock, gradually reviving to a sense of safety—that he was alive and whole. He could hear the blessed music of the running stream; all was deep darkness where he was, but he crept along until he could dip his hand in the water, and cool his scorched face and parched tongue. Lifting up his head, he could see the glare of the burning forest against the sky, and the huge showers of sparks floating off into space. Men pray instinctively in times of peril and preservation; Buckskin Joe, albeit unused to prayer, uttered a fervent exclamation of thankfulness for his escape. The next instant he buried his face in his hands with a groan. He had thanked God for his own welfare, but he shuddered as the fate of his companion rushed over him.

It seemed a long time to him before the break of day enabled him to do any thing; it was hard work for him to remain idle while a chance remained in favor of Nat's escape. The glorious September morning was dull with hovering smoke in this vicinity; Joe discovered, by its light, that he had dropped some

thirty feet down a precipice and lodged upon a shelf of rock so well cushioned with earth and moss that he had escaped without broken bones.

As he stood up and essayed to walk, he found himself stiff with bruises. Following the ledge upon which he was until he came around the precipice to a now broken and uneven fork, which promised sufficient foothold, he began to climb back to the forest. When he reached the surface of the wood, he found the fire still burning; the tops of the trees were consumed, but the trunks were standing like pillars of fire, and the ground—covered inches thick with dry pine-tassels, cones and other tinder-like combustibles—was now one mass of smoldering fire, upon which it was impossible to set foot.

The smoke was suffocating, coming as it did from the green wood of the trunks and branches, which were slowly charring without being consumed. If Nat Wolfe had not escaped by such an almost miraculous chance as had occurred to the guide, then he had indeed met a terrible death—nothing but his ashes could now remain upon that vast bed of fire.

There was life nowhere but in the deep ravine; back to that Buckskin Joe descended, with a heart of lead. Nearly all day he wandered up and down its intricacies, calling aloud, and getting only mocking echoes for answer.

He thought little of gold that day—he would have given a pound of gold for a pound of bread; and he would have given all the treasures he ever expected to find in the Rocky Mountains for a sight of his friend, alive and well before him. His acquaintance with Nat Wolfe had not been of long duration; but there was that in the stuff which Nat was made of which had secured the old guide's warmest friendship and admiration.

As the day wore away he gradually abandoned the faint hope to which, against reason, he had clung. Forlornly he set his face homeward. He would starve to death if he did not make his way out of that barren gully; there was no game, and if there had been, his rifle had been left to destruction. It being impossible to attempt the forest, all he could do was to follow the water-course until he could reach some track which was clear of the fire, through which he might strike for the settlement. That night he lay on the damp rock; the next day, hungry, rheumatic and low-spirited, he continued on a few miles, came out upon the open mountain side, and, guided by the sun and his general knowledge of the country, pushed forward for Pike's Peak. He could see the forest-fires still raging to the south of him; but the wind had carried them from his present vicinity. A few prickly pears from a tree which he found on his way gave him a welcome though insufficient dinner.

About sunset he entered Pike's Peak settlement, which he startled with the news of the fate of Nat Wolfe.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

My steps are turned away ;
 Yet my eyes linger still
 On their beloved hill,
 In one long, last survey ;
 Gazing, through tears that multiply the view,
 Their passionate adieu.—MRS. BARRETT.

"THERE is a train starts homeward to-morrow, Elizabeth. We can not have a better opportunity for going East under good protection. It will be no easier for you to part from your friends a month or a year from now—so I think best to warn you of my decision. You'll be happy with your father, will you not? I am sure you will. This is no place for you. I can surround you with circumstances which will make you as glad and gay as the birds; and you will be my darling, my life, my all, my daughter!"

The deep feeling with which Dr. Carollyn spoke made his voice tremble and stirred the heart of the young girl strangely. She raised her wistful eyes to his; she pressed his hand to assure him of her gratitude and affection—but what little light and color still remained in her pale face faded out, leaving it as white and fixed as death. First she glanced into the little log-cabin where Mrs. Wright was too busy over the wash-tub to hear what had been said, then out in the sunshine where the children were playing, and then her gaze wandered to the pine-forests far away. Wreaths of blue smoke still curled from the charred trunks of millions of trees and floated like a thin haze in the west and south. The settlement had been excited for many days, by melancholy reports of the loss of life occasioned by that disastrous fire.

The charred remains of a company of four persons had been found in one spot, whose names and history must forever remain unknown—strangers in a strange land—so perishing as to leave no link by which to connect them with their friends, whoever these might be. Wild rumors, setting the loss of life from thirty to a hundred, as already known, floated about, growing from day to day.

The fate of Nat Wolfe had made a profound impression, and still cast a shadow upon the thoughts of his former friends. Buckskin Joe had himself undertaken to communicate the tidings to the Wrights, feeling more than any other person that the news would harrow one young heart most cruelly. He had watched, with sagacious quiet, the progress of affairs

between the young people—had secretly chafed at the cold repulsion of Dr. Carollyn's manner toward the haughty hunter who would not make a single concession in advance—had thought he saw that Elizabeth was the deepest sufferer by this state of things—and had been making up his mind to tell Nat that he was a great fool not to take the young girl, in despite of her father—when the events of the last chapter so tragically cut short his plans for the two lovers.

"I'll be danged if I hadn't rather face the fire ag'in than to tell her," said the guide to himself, feeling wretchedly, "but thar's no one will break it so easy, mebbe—and I've got to out with it—that's all!"

He went straight to the log-cabin, in which the Wrights were established, more through the energy of Dr. Carollyn than any exertion of their own. The sunset streamed pleasantly into the little room, whose entrance-way was unopposed by other door than a piece of wagón-cover, which was let down at night.

Elizabeth was spreading a cloth on the grass outside, and Mrs. Wright was coming out with a tin plate heaped with biscuits and another with fried pork. Timothy was putting away his pipe, preparatory to supper.

"You're just in time, Joe," said the matron; "set by, and have somethin' to eat. You haven't been to supper, I hope."

The maiden had colored rose-red when she saw him coming; in her thoughts he was associated with Nat; she knew they had gone off on some kind of an expedition together, and she half expected to see the hunter in his wake. Joe saw the blush and groaned inwardly. Famished as he was, for he had stopped for no refreshment except a glass of whisky, he felt as if he could swallow nothing for the great lump that came up in his tough old throat. But so absolutely faint was he from exhaustion that he sunk down by the cloth, and stretching out his hand for a biscuit, began to eat it before the others were helped, or before he had made any answer to the hostess. Accustomed to the free-and-easy manners of his class, Mrs. Wright pushed the plate near him with a smile, called her husband and the children, and was pouring out the black coffee into tin cups, before she addressed her guest further:

"How's our friend, Nat Wolfe? He went 'long with you, didn't he?"

Joe swallowed his cup of scalding coffee, got up, and went into the cabin to light his pipe.

"I wish you'd eat your supper, Miss 'Lizabeth," he said, coming out and looking at her moodily.

She raised her eyes to his with a bright smile, but when she met his look, she startled, and grew anxious; the biscuit and bacon grew distasteful to her—she sipped her coffee, but not as if she cared for it.

"Did you have any luck, or wasn't you looking for a lead?" asked Mr. Wright, as the guide smoked in silence.

"Had some awful bad luck," answered Joe, letting his pipe fall and break to pieces. "We got caught in that fire, ye see. I got out of the scrape by hard scratching," here he paused entirely and stared at Elizabeth, who had set down her cup and was also staring at him.

"But what?" cried Mr. Wright. "My God! you don't mean to say that—that Nat Wolfe is lost!"

"Look out for that girl," called Joe, to Mrs. Wright, who turned and found Elizabeth fallen upon her face.

"I s'pose I've killed her, after all, muttered the guide, "it's my luck with that gal. Yes, Wright, Wolfe's gone, no mistake. I don't believe she's comin' to, right away; I guess I'll go for the Doctor."

"Yes, do—her father'll know just what to do. She's in a dead faint. It come on her so sudden."

"I hain't got sense to break any thing softly," muttered the old fellow, starting off in the direction of a cluster of tents, in one of which he had seen Dr. Carolyn as he passed by it. When he returned with that gentleman, the maiden was still unconscious; and it required time and skill to revive her from the deathly stupor into which she had been stricken.

Dr. Carolyn was shocked when he learned the cause of his daughter's illness; he had admired the hunter's brave and chivalric character, and felt grateful to him for the priceless service he had rendered in the rescue of his child—while he could not make up his mind to receive him as a son and a rival in the affections of that child. His awful and tragic fate affected him deeply; while he was pained to see the evidence of Elizabeth's interest in the lost one.

He hoped that a great part of the effect of the news upon her was owing to the weakened, excited state of her nerves, her mind and body having been overwrought by the occurrences of the past few weeks. That it was more a shock to her nerves than a fatal blow to her heart, he allowed himself to believe. He himself felt appalled by the sudden and terrible nature of the catastrophe.

With the utmost gentleness and tenderness he won her back to consciousness, and soothed and strengthened her through the two or three days' prostration which followed. During these days he made up his mind to wait no longer, before urging the necessary step of a parting from her old friends, than until she should be strong enough to undertake the return journey.

It was now a week since the news of the accident. Elizabeth was about her little duties, pale and quiet; and her father was making all needful preparations for a speedy departure. Having learned of a train that was about to start eastward, he had taken this time to give her warning of his intentions. Had

such a dazzling change in her prospects occurred a month ago, she would have welcomed it with all the delight and eagerness of her age. When oppressed with the dreariness of that long journey, tired of the homely fare, the rough company, if she had been told that such a father as this—a man to whom she could cling with all the fondness of her wild young heart—would come to her and offer all those splendors after which she had vaguely pined, her fancy would have reveled in happy enchantments—her dull life would have opened into a magic land, out of that monotonous desert.

Now her eyes fixed themselves upon the blackened forest with a gaze that could not be torn away; they seemed to say in that expression of mute longing and despair, that it would be sweeter to her to go there and throw herself, like the Hindoo widow, on that smoldering pyre, than to take her father's hand and go with him where every thing that makes life beautiful to the young awaited her. Such a depth of feeling in the breast of one who had been but a child a little while ago, proved that the character written in those mobile features and singularly expressive eyes was one of no ordinary power. She was one that, loving once, like her mother, would love so purely and deeply that to jar or rudely to doubt or destroy, would be death; and with this fondness was blended much of the passionate tenacity of her father's nature.

When Nat Wolfe, holding her, dying, in his arms, in the burning, solitary desert, sealed her soul with the impress of his own, that impress was eternal.

Finally, with a long, gasping sigh she withdrew her gaze, and trying to smile, said in a low voice:

"You are right, father. It is well to go at once, since we must go. It will not take much time to complete *my* preparations;" and truly, the gathering up of two calico frocks, and the precious box of mementoes left by her mother, constituted the whole of Elizabeth's trouble in the matter.

When Mrs. Wright heard the decision in favor of immediate departure, she left off wringing her clothes, and took to wringing her hands and crying in her demonstrative way.

"Don't, auntie, don't—it will make me more unhappy," said the maiden, so pitifully, that she made a great effort to restrain herself.

Timothy Wright didn't weep or wring his hands, but he walked about in a meaningless way, did every thing wrong that he tried to do, and made himself as useless and forlorn as usual.

Grieved as the couple were to part with their adopted niece, they never thought of opposing the step; they loved her too sincerely to oppose their claims against the prospect of her being placed as they had always felt she needed and deserved. Lizzie had been a rare and misplaced exotic in their homely

garden, and they had no wish to withhold her from the warmth and light and beauty necessary to her. They rejoiced heartily in her good fortune, trying to put their own loss out of sight.

Feeling how much he was taking from them, Dr. Carolyn did not prepare to leave them, without substantial tokens of his esteem and gratitude. He told Mr. Wright that farming was his legitimate business, not mining, and that there was a hundred-fold more gold to be found in carrots and corn and potatoes, than in the quarter of the ravines. The rich character of the land immediately at the foot of the mountain, and the fabulous prices which fruits and vegetables would bring for years to come, would insure a fortune to any farmer who would give his attention to the cultivation of articles needed in the market. Getting Wright's consent to the wisdom of the plan, he selected a suitable farm, bought cattle and utensils to enable him to work it, gave him money enough to live on for the winter, providing him fully with the ways and means for doing well.

The hour of parting came swiftly—was over—and Elizabeth, sundered from the past, completely, even in name—her father called her Annie—set out to recross those desert plains to the unknown realms of the great world which lay beyond—so near, so far away—so long dreamed of, so utterly unknown.

Buckskin Joe insisted upon being one of the party across the plains; he could not give up his oversight of the maiden whom he had taken in such special charge since the first glimpse into her young face had won him into her service; and when, after duly and safely seeing her as far on her way as the first steamboat landing on the route, he bade her farewell, tears stood in his eyes, as he gave her, with extra fervor, his parting benediction:

"The Lord bless and preserve ye, and keep ye from the bite of a rattlesnake!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED DECLARATION.

I know it—I feel it—he loves me at last!
The heart-hidden anguish is over and past!
Love brightens his dark eyes, and softens his tone;
He loves me! he loves me—his soul is mine own!

Mrs. Osgood.

IN among curtains of amber silk, which made the sunlight more sunny still, came the glow of an October afternoon. The rich atmosphere lay slumberously over the books and pictures and luxurious furniture of Dr. Carolyn's library. He was not

in; but occupying his easy-chair, drawn up near the pleasant window, reclined his daughter, motionless, with half-shut eyes, lost in a soft reverie:

"With her head at ease reclining,
On the cushion's velvet lining,
On the velvet, violet-lining, with the sunlight gloating o'er."

The little volume of blue and gold in which she had been reading had fallen away from her hand, and lay half-hidden in the fragrant folds of her dress; some strain of Tennyson's delicious music had thrilled her heart with memories more than hopes, for the dreamy luster of her eyes had a light more of tears than smiles. There was a light shadow on the clear, smooth forehead, a slight compression of the beautiful mouth—as if a word might startle that breathless dream into a shower of tears.

"Dear as remembered kisses after death."

this was the line at which she had dropped the poem, and sunk away into the past. The year just gone slipped out of her life and fell into the sea of oblivion with a sparkle—this house, this home, this father, these splendors, these pleasures slid away—she was not Annie Carolyn, rich, lovely, and flattered—but Elizabeth Wright, a sun-burned, forlorn, and starving girl, sinking down in a pitiless desert, with only a pair of strong arms to link her to life—only a long, long kiss of love and despair to hold her flitting soul until relief came. And where were the arms and where the lips that held her then?

"Dear as remembered kisses after death."

Ah, holy were the memories of that first, last kiss to the maiden—deep down in the most secret chamber of her soul they lay, so sacredly reserved, so sadly precious, that not even her quick-eyed father knew how they were enshrined.

In October Dr. Carolyn had arrived in his native city with his recovered treasure; and it was now the month of gold again. In that year he had grown many years younger. He found profound happiness in the possession of his lost child—peace after years of harrowing misery.

When that great calamity had befallen him in the days of his youth, he had shut up the house in which the brief scenes of his married life had been enacted, and had gone away from his practice and his friends, spending most of his time in restless travel from land to land, coming back occasionally to haunt the deserted house for a few weeks. As the tide of fashion moved up town he was advised to sell his mansion; but he would allow neither occupants, nor other changes than such as were necessary to preserve it from premature decay. The old house-keeper, who had been his mother's, and who welcomed his bride to her home, was left in charge of the furniture as long as she lived. This ancient friend had passed away, leaving every

thing to darkness and silence, before the return of the Doctor with his child.

Then came a change. The house was no longer upon a fashionable street, but it was quiet and respectable, and he would have no other. In *this* house he would begin life again. Sunshine was let into the long-closed rooms—the moldering curtains and carpets were replaced—an air of joy and luxury was given to the desolate mansion—only one room was left untouched and unseen save by the hand and eye of the master. When arrangements were complete, he took his daughter from the hotel where they had stopped, and brought her *home*—to be its star and queen.

Uncultivated as she necessarily was from her manner of life, his affection received very slight shock from his pride; for her beauty was of that refined and indisputable type to which all people yield obedience, and the grace of her beautiful nature gave a charm to her manners which surpassed the polish of finishing schools. She glided into her new estate as naturally as a swan into the water—she was only in her element.

Dr. Carollyn did not think of sending her from him to study; masters waited upon her at the house; pride and duty did not urge her to study more than her mind craved enlightenment. The interest she took in her books was a safeguard, had she needed any, against her becoming too much engrossed by the flatteries and gayeties of society; but her mind was of that noble order which could be affected by no such trivial dangers. She enjoyed, as youth and beauty should enjoy, the pleasures surrounding her; it was pleasant to be so loved and attended upon; but she was in no manner spoiled by indulgence. A fear of her own deficiencies gave a slight dash of humility to her otherwise rather queenly address; she was sweet, and proud, and fair, and quiet, the wonder and admiration of many. All this time, though not in the least morbid or melancholy, she carried with her a constant regret—a sorrow which shaded her too brilliant lot.

Dr. Carollyn guessed something of this; but since the source of this sorrow was one which could never interfere with himself, and since it made her so indifferent to the adulations of the young men of their circle, since it did not seriously interfere with her health and spirits, but only promised to keep her the more entirely his, that selfish instinct of jealousy caused him to no longer regret its existence.

A ray of sunshine creeping aslant the slumberous atmosphere, fixed itself in the purple braids of the young girl's hair like a *golden arrow*. But she knew not how the cunning hand of the sun was bewitching her—she wist not how beautiful was the lustrous repose of her face, and the silken gleam of her garments—her soul was far away. The faint tinkle of a bell sounded through the quiet house, the outer door was opened

and closed; she did not hear any thing; she did not even stir when the noiseless door of the library swung back and the quiet footman entered with a card.

"Shall I tell him you are at home, Miss Carollyn?"

She started and glanced up, taking the card which he handed her with a little surprise at his doubting air. His knowledge of the proprieties did not extend to a recognition of the name upon the pasteboard—it might be that of the Ambassador of Spain—he did not know—the gentleman who gave it looked passable, certainly. Mechanically, for she had not shaken off the spell which the poem had wrought on her, she read:

"GOLDEN ARROW."

Confused by the unknown name, the footman had failed to close the door into the apartment which he entered, and the audacious stranger, in the hall, had obeyed an irresistible impulse to approach the end of the hall, and look after the fate of his card. He had a full view of the maiden dreaming in the "violet-lined" chair; had noted the rich clearness of her rounded cheek, the glossy smoothness of her hair, the tremulous, sorrowful depression of the dark eyelashes and red lips; had absorbed with an eager glance the grace of her drapery, the elegance of her surroundings—and now, he watched her, startled from her reverie, listlessly look at the card, turn red and pale, and throw a wild, bewildered look toward the entrance where he stood.

"Let him come in," she said, rising to her feet.

The footman bowed, and retiring, sent the visitor in. As he came forward, she stood, slightly leaning forward, pale as death, doubt, fear and startled surprise in face and attitude, and a look of bewilderment over all.

A moment the two stood looking full into each other's eyes; then the stranger smiled, and she cried:

"Nat!"

A mutual impulse, such as thrills from breast to breast of man and woman like an electric shock, moved them both. He held out his arms appealingly, but not sooner than she sprung forward to be clasped in them. They were alive, face to face, heart to heart—that was enough.

For a few moments this blissful truth was all they cared to realize. Presently they stood apart, wondering at their own impulses, their own joy. If Elizabeth—we *must* call her Elizabeth to the end of the chapter—had been beautiful before, she was radiant now. Her clear, dark complexion and expressive features were made for just such light and color as filled them now. Her lover gazed upon her in rapture, and her own timid glance sought to repay his admiration in kind.

This was indeed Nat Wolfe, the hunter of the plains, towering in frame, erect in carriage, dashing and chivalrous in manner—this his frank smile and kindling eye; but the roughness

of his wild life was smoothed away. The gleaming rifle, frightful knife and hunter's frock were exchanged for a civilized dress, at which the scrupulous footman at the door could not have carped. Only one peculiarity of his adventurous life was retained—he wore that long, bright hair of his as loosely as ever. It streamed about his neck in a fashion unknown to Broadway; but it accorded so well with his unusual height and manly bearing that it gave him the dignity of the famous men of old.

Suddenly Elizabeth said, with a return of the doubting air:

"Are you really alive, Nat?"

"I hope so," he answered, laughing, but very earnest, "since I am so blessed. If you do not believe it, sit here, will you, by my side, and let me tell you just how it is that I have come, a sound spirit in a sound body, to inquire after the welfare of the little girl whom I found once on the great prairie."

They sat side by side upon the sofa, hand clasped in hand.

"On that awful night in which I awakened in the heart of the forest to find myself surrounded by a sea of fire, my first impulse was to alarm my companion. I groped about in the suffocating smoke; but I am since convinced, by comparing notes with Joe, that, confused and blinded as I was, I worked in the wrong direction. I was probably the one who was first awake, as he says he is certain he reached the spot where I ought to have been before making efforts for his own escape. Failing in all attempts to join him, and at times half insensible from the oppressive smoke, I made a desperate effort to preserve strength and reason for an escape from the frightful ocean of flame which roared and surged around, above, everywhere, except down in the hell of heat and vapor through which I crawled. The same idea which came to Buckskin Joe, of attempting to reach the gorge, occurred to me; but I was now so bewildered by the search for him, that I no longer was certain in which direction it lay.

"I crept along on my hands and knees, feeling the heat each moment more intolerable. I struggled for breath, until I finally sunk, and lay helpless, my eyes upturned to that strange, fearful, yet gorgeous vision of leaping and flickering fire in the tree-tops, surging in the wind, against a black, starless sky. I yielded to the dangerous enchantment of the light; a deadly languor and drowsiness crept over me—at that perilous moment you seemed to call me, dear Elizabeth, and gave me superhuman energy. I struggled against death—against fate; I would not yield—I would not die! Once more I crawled along; thank God, a breath of air, cool, sweet, delicious, struck my face; the next instant the bed of grass and pine-tassels beneath me gave way, and I fell into darkness and insensibility.

"How long I remained unconscious I could never tell. When

I recovered a memory of my situation, I felt about me in the darkness, and was convinced that I had dropped through the opening of a cave on to the earth and rocks within. It might be that I was immured in some cavern from which there was no outlet—that I had escaped death by fire to find here a more lingering but not less certain destruction. No matter; to have escaped from that terrible torment above me was enough for the present. After I had fully recovered my presence of mind, I recollected that I had a match-box in my pocket, well supplied; I lighted one of the frail tapers, and by its brief flare had an instant view of a wide and wonderful cave, stretching away into unfathomed darkness, and glittering here and there with fanciful stalactites. It was a weird place in which to be entombed.

"Groping at my feet I scraped together the dry leaves and sticks I had brought down in my fall, and lighted them; before they burned entirely out, I had gathered by the light they gave, quite an armful of fuel, which, from time to time, had apparently fallen through from the fissure above. With these I built a fire, in the hope that its flame would enable me to detect some opening, by which I might trace a path out of this perilous place. The flames arose brightly, throwing crimson gleams athwart the gloom, revealing marvelous crystals flashing from columns which seemed built of ice and marble, and shining against what looked like cascades fixed in the very act of pouring from the heights above.

"Anxious as I was, and bent only on finding an outlet, I could not withhold a curious and admiring gaze from the splendid shapes half revealed in the flickering light. The roof was fringed with glittering crystals; but, though I saw the openings of many chambers, caverns within caverns, stretching into darkness where I dared not venture, I saw no gleam of the day which I knew must be shining over the blessed world outside.

"When all the fuel I could gather was nearly exhausted, I made a splendid discovery. I found a good pine-knot, which would burn for an hour or two, and might light me either further into the hopeless intricacies of a living tomb, or out into safety. I lighted this welcome torch and immediately started upon an exploring expedition, such as I had never before undertaken. I could only trust to fate at the best. Out of all the passages inviting me there were many chances that I should take the wrong one, when probably only one was right. Eagerly I pushed forward along what appeared to be the main hall of this majestic cave. For at least a half mile my path was clear; then I heard the sound of running water, and presently came to a stream which I thought completely blocked the narrowing way between lofty rocks; but I ventured upon a rough and slippery path, and by much climbing, passed the worst of it, and came out again to a wide, subterraneous chamber.

"Here I was astonished to observe traces of human labor and handicraft. I came upon various tools, which seemed intended for mining purposes, and were made of hardened copper. As they were not like those in use by our own miners, I was forced to the conclusion that I had stumbled upon some of the relics of the ancient people of this continent. I looked about curiously, and by the glare of my torch fell upon a heap of ore, piled up on a dry rock in the corner of the chamber—a heap of glittering ore, washed from the soil and gravel, and ready for the crucible. I examined it—it was gold! gold in crumbly dust, in irregular lumps, in broken quartz, enough of it gathered and heaped in that long-neglected pile to make me, dear Elizabeth, a much richer man than I had ever aspired to be.

"For a few moments my breath came hard; I was excited, as men are at the sight of countless wealth. But my torch began to flicker and wane. Gold was not bread, nor water, nor sunlight—it was not life—I was fighting for life. I pressed on; but in less than half an hour my pine-knot was consumed.

"Exhausted, I sat down a few moments to rest, and to nibble the dry biscuit which chanced to be in my pocket. This little refreshment gave me new energy. I groped along, following the stream—I had a strong hope that that noisy babbler would lead me out of this cavern sometime, provided I did not drown myself or break my neck before that happy time should arrive.

"I was not wrong in my conjecture. After suffering mental and bodily torture which I will not distress you by speaking of, suffice it that I emerged, the second day of my entombment, into the light of the sun once more.

"I found myself in one of the wildest gorges of the Rocky Mountains. How I supped that night on a prickly pear—how I killed a wild animal the next day with my hunting knife, and lived on its flesh during the rest of my adventures—how I took care to mark the devious and intricate path, by which, after nearly a week of travel, I found myself upon familiar ground again—how I finally worked my way to Pike's Peak—of all this I will some day give you the particulars.

"I will only say now how stricken I felt when I heard of the departure of my little girl, only two days previously, and that I was too proud to follow when her father had kept me at such distance. I will only say, sweetest, how my heart burned when good Mrs. Wright told me of the blow it had been to you when you thought me lost. I believed that you loved me, and I blessed you in my inmost soul. I resolved to go some time and ask you if it were not so. But not just then. I would go in such guise that your haughty father should not discard me—at least with good reason.

"I returned upon my tiresome journey back to that wonderful cavern, but this time I went well armed, provisioned and escorted, with a few chosen men to share the dangers and the spoils. I led my little band to the exact locality, and, by following the subterranean stream as I had done at my exit, I made my way to those old chambers where unknown miners of an extinct race had toiled centuries ago, laying up riches to help me in my little plot for happiness.

"We brought away the accumulated gold which by some purpose or accident had been left concealed in the cavern; I had the lion's share, but there was enough for all. Your good uncle, Mr. Wright, was one of the fortunate ones.

"I left Pike's Peak several months ago. I met Buckskin Joe on the plains. He wished me good-luck, told me to 'fear for the best,' and sent you, as a token of his everlasting friendship, this golden arrow, which he had manufactured from a lump of the precious metal which he took from that ravine. May I put it in your hair, dear Lizzie?

"I have been a long time at my father's home in this State—a home which I deserted years ago, driven forth into the wilds of the West by a silly and heartless girl that I have seen, this summer, fat, frowsy, and commonplace, boxing her children's ears. My dear mother was dead. But my father was alive and still preaching to a loving and devoted congregation. You wouldn't have guessed I was a minister's son, would you, little one? And a minister's son is almost as respectable as a doctor's daughter—particularly when he is worth half a million. Besides, I have shorn my shaggy coat. I'm not quite such a bear as I used to be. Do you think I am?"

She smiled as he bent his handsome face to look into her eyes; then her head drooped, until her face was hidden in his arm.

"I should have loved you as much, had you been just the same," she said. "But why did you stay away so long?—so near, and never to let me know?"

"Was it wrong, Lizzie? Perhaps it was, but I wanted to give you a chance to make a different choice if your taste inclined. When you knew me, you did not know the world. I would not take advantage of your ignorance. I came to this house with fear and trembling, but your sweet eyes told me the truth the moment I looked in them. Those eyes of yours! Well, my little girl, I don't know as they are any more beautiful than they were the first time they looked at me from under that faded sun-bonnet. They took Golden Arrow captive at the first glance."

Her head lay upon his breast.

"These were strange days," she murmured.

And a sweet silence fell upon both. Up in the horizon of

memory crept the herds of bison, whistled the midnight hurricane, rode the shy bands of stealthy savages, crept the long day of solitude and starvation, in which their love first spoke from mute eyes and clinging lips.

Dr. Carolyn admitted himself to the house with his night-key and stepped lightly into the library, with a kiss on his mouth ready for his daughter. He paused, as the *tableau vivant* of the happy lovers met his gaze; the smile suddenly died out and an awful frown gathered in its stead.

"Annie!"

She started at the cold, crisp word; for an instant she shrank, then springing up, still clinging to her lover's hand, she said, softly, but with a firmness borrowed from her father's blood:

"This is Nat Wolfe, dear father. He has come back to life and me. You must take both or neither of us!"

"*Must!*"—humph! it had come to that, had it? That was too bitter a pill for Dr. Carolyn to swallow, albeit it was a favorite prescription of his.

A moment his dark eyes blazed at the young couple standing before him, neither of whose faces flashed less resolute than his own; then turning abruptly upon his heel, without the courtesy of a word to the unwelcome visitor, he retreated to his chamber, and Elizabeth saw no more of him that evening.

Plainly the evil spirit had not been so finally driven out of him as he had hoped. That night he wrestled with it again, in the solitude of his room, knowing well that while he struggled, the child, dearer to him than his own life, must be wetting her pillow with tears which himself alone was causing to flow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRTHDAY AND THE LETTER.

I took the scroll; I could not brook
An eye to gaze on it save mine.

But oh, to-night, those words of thine
Have brought the past before me;
The shadows of long-vanished years
Are passing sadly o'er me.—MISS LONDON.

Dr. CAROLLYN arose late the next morning; a night of unrest had hardly decided him to obey his better nature. With the breakfast which he ordered in his chamber came two or three packages left at the door that morning from the princely establishments of merchants and jewelers which he had visited the previous day. They were presents for Elizabeth. This

very day was her eighteenth birthday; and these were some of the costly gifts he had pleased himself selecting for his daughter.

The blue silk dress—her mother's favorite color—of a new and lovely shade, rich and lustrous; the coronal and necklace of pearls, the cashmere shawl, the dainty perfumes in bottles flagedreed with gold—he set the packages before him on the table, not offering to untie them, staring at them coldly, as he trifled with his coffee and toast.

Unreasonable as the black jealousy which had once blotted the sunshine out of that house was the anger with which he thought of the man who had yesterday intruded himself into his new-made Paradise. "Was he never to have any peace?"

We are afraid peace is not purchased with such a temper as yours, Dr. Carollyn.

In the mean time Elizabeth had gone down to the solitary breakfast room, tremulous with love and tears, meaning to throw herself upon her father's breast and speak for Nat the words he was too proud to urge for himself. When she found herself alone at the meal, of course appetite and courage failed; she went to her chamber, and gazed out at the golden sunshine as if it had been a great gray cloud drifting up and obscuring her birthday—her birthday! yes, she was eighteen, and she remembered with a thrill the faded yellow envelope lying carefully locked amid her most precious treasures, which had held for so many years the letter of her dead mother awaiting this very day.

With a reverend touch she now drew forth this missive, and with careful, trembling fingers broke the seal; a mist swam before her eyes as she first gazed at this delicate, indistinct chirography, but it cleared away with the kiss she pressed upon the paper.

Between herself and her father there had never been any explicit understanding as to the melancholy causes of the separation of the parents; the subject was one so painful that it had been avoided, with the confession of Dr. Carollyn that all the fault had been his, and that sometime her child should know all that he could tell her of the life and character of her adored, her angelic mother.

A desire to understand the mystery mingled with the reverent affection with which the young girl began the perusal of the letter:

"MY OWN DEAR CHILD—MY DAUGHTER:—I tremble while I write the word daughter, for I feel how much sadder, more deadly perilous it will be for my poor orphan, that she is born to the heritage of woman. Before you came to me I prayed that you might be a boy, and if I regret that my prayer was not answered, you will know that my love and solicitude are in proportion to my regret.

"When you read this, if you ever do, you will have come to woman's estate; now, while I write, you sport in the grass and flowers at my feet, scarcely able to balance yourself on the unequal ground, your bright hair blowing about your face in little rings, your eyes trying to catch mine, full of laughter and love, so innocent, so gay—yet, oh God, so like his own—yes, darling they are his eyes which look at me constantly through my baby's. I stop, to catch you to my heart, to hold you there till you cry with the cruel fondness, and I set you down, and push you softly away—for I would not hurt you even with my love! ah, no! it is so dreadful to love only to be killed by love. It is strange that I love him yet, seeing that he has wronged me in such a manner that I can never go back to him, never have any more happiness or faith; but I do—I do, and the very perfectness with which I loved him makes the impossibility of my ever going back to him again, who gave me my death-blow so pitilessly.

"Yesterday I chanced upon some lines—written by a woman. I know they were—which told my story partly—all but the love—the despair—for it was the hand dearest to me in the world which sent the arrow, and *that* is what murdered me.

"A whisper woke the air,
A soft, light tone, and low,
Yet barbed with shame and woe.
Ah! might it only perish there,
Nor further go!

"It was the only *heart* it found—
The only heart 'twas meant to find,
When first its accents woke.
It reached the gentle heart at last,
And that—it broke!

"Low as it seemed to other ears,
It came a thunder crash to hers—
That fragile girl so fair and gay.
'Tis said a lovely humming-bird,
That dreaming in a lily lay,
Was killed but by the gun's report
Some idle boy had fired in sport;
So exquisitely frail its frame
The very *sound* a death blow came:
And thus her heart, unused to shame—
Shrined in its lily too—
Her light and happy heart, that beat
With love and hope so fast and sweet,
When first that cruel word it heard,
It fluttered like a frightened bird—
Then shut its wings and sighed,
And with a silent shudder, died!"

"I was not so happy as that poor girl to die so quickly, but the wound was none the less fatal that it was the more lingering. I thought I could not, would not live—and perhaps it was you, growing in my life and soul, whose expected coming held

me back. But I am going now and soon. *Now* I wish that I were to live. I would be willing to endure years of worse sorrow, for the privilege of shielding my poor little baby flower from the world's harshness. But the desire comes too late. I must leave you, leave my little helpless orphan girl to the mercy of every wind that blows.

"My darling, you will surely think your mother mad or foolish. I began this letter because I could not go away from earth without leaving you some token of the unspeakable tenderness I feel—some message from *your mother*. And I have only been talking of myself and of griefs with which I should not have saddened your girlish heart.

"It has been a question which I have debated long and anxiously, whether I ought to send you to him upon whom you have a child's claim—whether I have any right to keep you from the name and fortune and the paternal care to which you are entitled. God forgive me if I have chosen wrong—if that which I have suffered has so clouded my vision that it seems better to me that you should take the risk of happiness in this humble, secluded home, rather than in that brilliant sphere which has proved not so bright as it is cold and pitiless.

"*Here* my soul has never been wounded; *here* suspicion, distrust, has never been manifest—only the kindness and affection of honest, unsophisticated hearts. Am I wrong, then, in leaving you to such guardianship, sure to be true and unpretending, even though I wrong you out of a more splendid heritage—out of worldly wealth and fictitious tenderness? It seems to me, who have been hurled so suddenly from my pinnacle of bliss, as if the lowest rest were the safest. And who knows?—it might even be if I sent to him the child of *our love* that he might deny you, my innocent little angel babe, the claim upon him which you have? Would it be more cruel than the wrong he visited upon his wife? No! I will not trust you to him—to your own father, Elizabeth!—though I love him still as completely as the day he led me to our wedding rites.

"But if fate should throw you into his care—if he should seek you and find you and seize upon you as *his*, absorb you into himself, fatally, as he has me, I will pray to the Heavenly Father, in whose presence I shall be dwelling, that he may never darken your life as he has mine—that he will cherish you, not for his own, but *your* sake, love you, as your mother loves, self-forgetting, for your happiness and not his own glory. I will pray that that iron will of his, to which I delighted to yield, which I felt only as a band of flowers, because I loved him so, may never tighten about your heart, as it did about mine. I will pray and trust—God will be good to my little orphan girl. I leave you to *Him*, rather than to any earthly father.

"And now, I have said nothing, can say nothing. Only that

I love my child—that I go away from her with a pang which only dying mothers feel—that I will, if it is permitted me, still watch over her from the blue heights of heaven—that I expect to meet her, some happy future day, in the pure eternal city.

"The little mementoes which I shall be able to leave you will be dear to you because they have been dear to your mother. Among them is my wedding-ring. Keep it for your bridal Good-by, my daughter—it is so hard to say good-by.

"If it should prove, by the time you read these words, that you have found your father, I need not tell you to love him, for none can help that; you will be a good daughter; but if he stands between you and happiness, plead with him, for *my sake*, to deal gently with my child. And so, again, good-by. God bless and keep you, my darling. Good-by. You will come to me sometime, after you have done with this brief world. Till then, God will be with my child.

"Your mother,

"ANNIE ST. JOHN CAROLLYN."

Elizabeth's tears were dropping upon the faded letter—that wayward, fond, not overly-wise letter which had evidently torn itself out of the mother's heart, whether she would or not, and written itself down, without thought of wisdom or plan. And yet, as by some strange, prophetic foreboding, had she not pictured forth the future precisely as it now stood?

Again and again she read the passage:

"If he should seek you and find you and seize upon you as *this*, absorb you fatally into himself, as he has me, I will pray to the Heavenly Father," etc.; and as she brooded over it, her tears ceased to fall, a light came into her face, and she whispered, looking up:

"My dear mother is praying for me now; she is watching over me, softening my father's pride, blessing *our* love—yes! she approves my love for Nat—*she* will plead our cause. I will not go proudly away from my father, as I intended, when he so insulted my lover last night. I will take him my mother's letter, and that shall be our peacemaker."

With the letter in her hand she went to her father's door; but her knock remained unanswered. She had not heard him leave the house, and stood irresolute, half-minded to intrude, without being bidden, into his presence. While she hesitated, the door of the room adjoining was partially unclosed. She looked up in surprise, for it was the chamber forever closed, into which she had not been permitted to look since she entered the house—the chamber where only the master went, alone, at night, to surround himself with ghosts of the past—her mother's bridal-chamber.

"Come in here, Annie!"

She hardly knew her father's voice, oppressed with emotions which his pride endeavored to subdue; but she caught a

glimpse of his face, troubled, and wet with tears, and she sprung forward, forgetful in an instant of her own wishes, flinging her arms about his neck. Softly he closed the door, and the two were in the apartment, haunted by the long-vanished presence of one, the young, the beautiful, the happy—the dead wife and mother—the tragic close of whose brief dream of bliss had overshadowed the luxury and beauty of this spot with a darkness which could be lifted in this world—"nevermore!"

Timidly Elizabeth looked around, moved by a curiosity that was all reverence and love. The blinds of one window were flung open and the sunshine burst through, melting into the amber drapery of the heavy silk curtains like topazes into gold. Save that the furniture was kept scrupulously free from dust, proving the frequency of her father's visits, scarcely an article seemed to have been moved from its place in all those years. Curtains of amber silk corresponding with those of the windows draped the bed, faded by time, but otherwise unchanged. The party-dress which the bride had worn that fatal evening, lay across the pillows where she had thrown it when she exchanged it for the traveling suit in which she made her escape. The little satin slippers of the same color as the dress, stood side by side on the carpet near by. The sight of these touched the young girl beyond all else; she sprung to them, took them up, kissed and pressed them to her bosom, all unreflecting of the pang the impulsive action inflicted on another, until a sound like that of a strangled sob, caused her to replace them, and return to Dr. Carolyn, who had sunk into the chair nearest him—her favorite chair, a dainty, cushioned thing of amber satin brocade, well fitted for a lady's chamber.

"Dear father," she said, holding his hand, and looking into his eyes with a love which ought to have satisfied him.

"Yet you wish to throw me away—you love another better than me," were the words he said.

He had not meant to say them; he had come into that room for the purpose of obtaining complete mastery over the tyrannous part of himself, and he thought had conquered it forever; and he had no more than said them, before he was ashamed, adding quickly:

"I do not blame you for it, little one. I shall not oppose you—only I have had you such a brief time to myself. Is it strange I was disconcerted to find myself put away so soon?"

"Not put away, dear father—not loved any less, but rather more than ever. Oh, father, I know you will not condemn a happiness which you once knew so sweet. Do you know, I am eighteen to-day? I have been reading my mother's letter; here it is—read it, too, will you not?"

She thrust it into his trembling hand; she dared not look at him, but went and sat at the window while he read.

The silence was long and oppressive; at length she ventured to turn to her father, and saw him sitting motionless, with bowed head, great tears rolling silently down his face and dropping upon the paper clutched in his hand. She stole to his feet, knelt, and clasped her hands over his knee, looking up at him with a glance full of sympathy and confidence—she trusted to the power of the mother up in heaven who had said that she should watch over her at this crisis.

"She knew me better than I knew myself," muttered the proud man; "I do not wonder that she wanted to hide you away from my selfishness, Annie."

"Yet she loved you so, through it all," murmured the young girl.

"She did. The letter is like herself—her goodness is more than I can bear. But it is not too late for me to prove myself worthy of that love yet. No, my child, I will not wring the life out of your warm young heart with this steely will of mine. Where is this lover of yours? Send for him. Be he bear or buffalo, wild Indian or adventurer, he shall be my son. You shall share with him all that I have to give."

"He is neither bear nor buffalo," cried Elizabeth, smiling through her tears. "If you will only take a good look at him, papa, you will see what he is—you will not be ashamed of him."

"Pshaw!" muttered Dr. Carollyn, rising, and shaking himself. "But where did you say he could be sent for, little one?"

"At the Metropolitan, I am quite sure he said."

"No doubt of it, then. Come, I will send Pomp with an invitation, in my own name, for him to dine with us this evening. Come into my room, and while I am writing the note you can be examining these parcels, which seem to be directed to you."

They passed out into his bedchamber, and while he quietly indited quite a lengthy note, for an invitation to dinner, Elizabeth untied the precious packages one by one. It was not the beauty and splendor of these birthday presents, however delightful these were, which gave that rich bloom to her cheek, that lustrous gladness to her eyes. One stolen glance at her radiant countenance half repaid her father for the sacrifice he was making.

That was a memorable evening in the household calendar. When the three sat down to the repast—which, in honor both of the birthday and the betrothal, was served with the most sumptuous appointments of which the establishment was capable—the haughty physician, divesting himself of the ugly green spectacles of jealousy, looked at his guest with fair, appreciative eyes. He was forced to admit that this great, overgrown, self-willed son of his was no unfit match for his daughter; in fact, that he was really a magnificent man, with brain and talent

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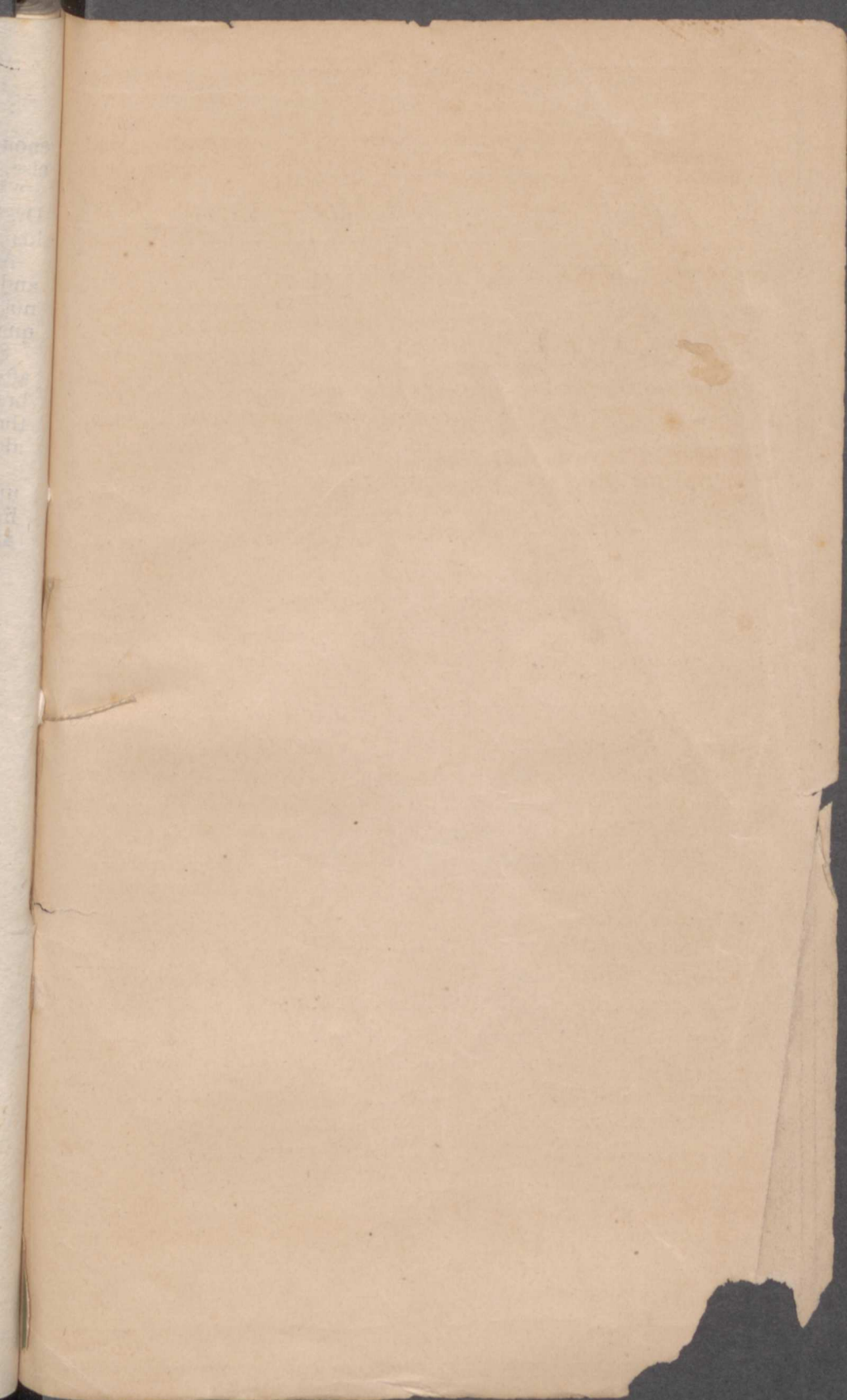
"No danger of my hurting him with my iron will," smiled Dr. Carolyn to his own thought, as he measured the strength of his whilom antagonist, but now friend and son.

And he liked the idea—for proud people respect pride in others; and, since Annie would fall in love and be married, he could not remember any young man in the whole circle of his acquaintance, who, all things considered, was so satisfactory.

So he made himself very agreeable at that little dinner; and after it was over, and they had talked together awhile in the library, he made an excuse to withdraw to his own room, leaving the young girl showing her gifts to her lover, and the two were alone with their happy hopes.

Youth and beauty, and love and peace—let us leave them upon the threshold of the promised future. We can see the light which shines out of the opening door; the twain step over and disappear in the enchanted atmosphere within.

THE END.



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